

ISAAC ASIMOV's

SCIENCE • FICTION • MAGAZINE

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A STUDENT'S
VIEW OF
CLARION



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ISAAC ASIMOV'S

SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE

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EDITORIAL

SLUSH



by Isaac Asimov

It seems that a number of readers are annoyed at receiving unadorned rejection slips—the sending of which is a time-honored tradition of the publishing business. I sympathize with them for, living legend though I now am, there was a time when I was victimized by these things, too. So we've printed a few letters and I've given my usual brief, flip answers.

The letters we've printed are thoughtful and reasonably polite, but one letter we received was from someone who was far too angry to be polite, let alone logical, so let me use it as a springboard to discuss this matter of rejection slips in detail. It won't be the first time. In the December 1979 issue I had an editorial entitled "Rejection Slips," but that was five years ago. Many of our present readers may never have read it, and maybe I didn't express myself with sufficient clarity. Let me try again.

The letter that moved me to write this editorial opens, "Shawna:" It breathes fury at once. It is customary, after all, even in the angriest of letters, to begin with "Dear Shawna," but this the

writer clearly could not bring himself to do.

He then goes on to the meat of it. He says, "The 'slush' you spit at in your comment (Sept., '84)—" At this point I stopped and got my copy of the September issue. Shawna spat? That's not like her at all. I know hardly anyone as respectable and well-behaved as she is. I looked up her comment and here it is, in full: "In the days when we used the checklist system, we had some 8 people reading the 'slush.' We now have one—me. I'm also quite uncertain as to how much help a preprinted, general comment is to any specific writer or story. I do try to put short notes on the rejection slips of stories which show some promise."

Where is the spitting? It is a quiet and eminently reasonable statement. It may be that our letter-writer feels the use of quotation marks about the word "slush" is derogatory, but that is merely Shawna's careful writing style. She felt the word to be a slang expression and many people put slang words and phrases into quotes.

Actually, "slush" is not slang. I looked it up in that great reference

work of the American language, Webster's 2nd edition. Under "slush," it gives, as the fourth definition: "Confused and emotional, but unsubstantial, talk or writing; gush; drivel."

Since much (but not all) of beginners' attempts at writing which find their unsolicited way to an editor's office is indeed slush, in that sense of the word, editors took to speaking of unsolicited manuscripts as representing "the slush pile" or, eventually, simply as "slush." It is now the common way of referring to said unsolicited manuscripts and does not necessarily have a pejorative meaning. One could just as easily speak of "over-the-transom manuscripts" or "under-the-door manuscripts" and sometimes one does. It is, however, shorter to say "slush."

If slush were universally bad, then it would be simple for an editor simply to send it back without reading it. That, however, would mean that when all the established writers died, the magazine would have to close up shop. Besides, all the established writers were once represented in the slush themselves. I certainly was.

No, poor Shawna must wade through the slush pile meticulously and hopefully, in search of the occasional gem, or near-gem, that shows up. The reason she's "poor," however, is that it's a tedious and thankless task. It is a tedious one, because the vast majority of manuscripts are not publishable and show little or no

promise; what can one do but return them? As for checking off "spelling atrocious" or "dumb plot," what good would that do even if Shawna could bring herself to make such cruel remarks? The writer would be just as furious at getting such a comment as at getting none. *More* furious.

And that's why the task is a thankless one. Writers who feel cheated at not getting a comment probably feel they are 95 percent of the way there and just need a little help to go the rest of the way. Believe me, that's not so. If you were 95 percent there, we would take the story like a shot. But suppose you only *think* you're 95 percent of the way there, and are actually only 2 percent of the way there because you used paper and not birchbark? What do we do?

In my younger days, I would occasionally accede to a beginner's request that I read a manuscript and give a detailed critique. I would read the manuscript and send it back with a list of the flaws. Never once, *never once*, did I get a letter of thanks in return. It dawned on me that they didn't want a list of the flaws; they wanted to be told they were wonderful. So I stopped and I've never done it again.

Besides, as I told one writer in the letter column, it is not an editor's job to teach writing. Shawna doesn't have the time to undertake such duties, and she isn't paid enough to do that job in addition to her own. There are people who will undertake to look at a begin-

ner's manuscript and come up with a critique, but they charge considerably more than most beginners can afford. (It comes as a nasty shock to some people that payment is expected for such work. There are some people who seem to be quite certain that I, for instance, ought to be glad to do it for nothing.)

Back to the letter. The writer goes on to say, that the slush "is, for the most part, sent to you by people who buy your magazine."

Well, of course. All the people who try to make it in Hollywood are movie-goers. All the people who try to make it as athletes go to athletic meets. The role of faithful onlooker, however, is insufficient, in itself, to earn you success. If we were to accept stories from our readers just because they *were* our readers, our other readers would object loudly and vociferously.

Look, this may sound awful, but we would take a good story from someone who never read this magazine, and reject a bad story from our most loyal reader. That's what we are in business for—to accept good stories and reject bad ones.

If I were in Shawna's place and my dear wife Janet were to send me a story I thought was a bad one, I would reject it—even though I might dread going home at the end of the day. And in my role as editor of anthologies, I have accepted a story from a writer whom I disliked so much that I was dreadfully sorry it was a good story. But it was, and I took it.

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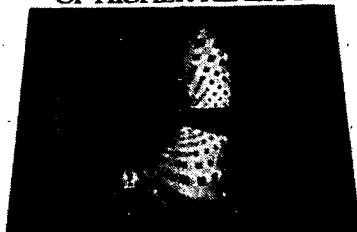
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RUDY RUCKER
AUTHOR OF INFINITY AND THE MIND

The letter-writer has worked out what the trouble is. His final paragraph is heavily sarcastic: "But cheer up, Shawna—Isaac's egotism is showing on you and in no time at all you will have alienated your subscribers to the point that they will not only stop sending you their 'slush,' they will have also stopped buying your magazine." And to prove his point, he (or possibly she) bravely signs himself (or herself) "A Former Subscriber." No other name, no address.

Well, I won't argue over my own egotism. Anyone who wants to believe me a monster of vanity and conceit is welcome to do so. However, Shawna is a sweet and rather retiring individual who has no con-

ceit about her.

Anyway, let me summarize. Our readers can be divided into two classes—

1) A vast majority—who read the magazine more or less faithfully, who like it with varying degrees of intensity, and who never submit anything for publication. They couldn't care less about our rejection policy as long as (whatever it is) it manages to get them good stories to read, and that is what we try to bring to them—to the best of our judgement.

2) A small minority who submit stories, and these can, in turn, be divided into three classes:

2a) A small minority of the minority who show definite promise

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the future
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and with whom Shawna tries to work by means of helpful comments and encouragement and who might well sell us a story after a while—sometimes after a short while.

2b) Most of the minority, who do not show much promise but who accept rejections—even unadorned rejection slips—quietly and either keep on trying or give up. I suspect a great many of them keep on trying.

2c) A small minority of the minority who take rejection with such anger that they march away in a huff. There's nothing we can do with these except to say "Good-bye" and wish them luck in another and better world, for with that attitude they're not likely to have it in this cruel and miserable one.

Actually, my main concern and sympathy is with class 2b. What do we do with those who don't show particular promise, but who plug away at it?

There's hope for them. Once in a while, our judgement that there is no particular promise in a particular writer may be wrong. And once in a while, simply by trying and trying, a writer can develop enough skill to begin to show promise. It has happened.

Therefore, we are always ready to receive and to read slush; and when we send an unadorned rejection slip we are *not* suggesting that the writer stop submitting. Please

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submit to us again and again. Eventually, we might possibly see something we like. If you stop submitting, we will *never* see anything we like.

And, please, don't get mad. Believe me, Shawna is doing her best—and I am, too. ●

LETTERS.

Dear Dr. Asimov,
and Ms. McCarthy,

I have just finished reading the letter sent to you by Andrew Poulos, and the sad fact of the matter is that he is absolutely right.

A check list, in itself, would be an inexpensive item to include with rejections. Especially if it was printed on the same piece of paper that the rejection itself was printed on. It would cost no more than it does at present—you are paying for the rejection slips anyway, and the authors are providing return postage. No, the rub here is simple.

Ms. McCarthy stated that she is now the only one reading slush. Personally, I doubt she has the time. I would estimate that if she attempts to read any of the unsolicited manuscripts at all, that she has time to read only a paragraph or more at best. Unless an author makes a truly remarkable start, it is unlikely that she would read all the way through what might have proved to be a perfectly publishable story.

This is what eliminates the possibility of using a checklist—the stories are not being read, or are so scantily read that it would be impossible to give an author reasons for the rejection.

Yet, every now and then, an author will slip through into the lime-

light. I think human nature, more than anything else, accounts for this. Maybe an editor was in a good mood that day, and went ahead and completely read a script from the slush pile. Who knows? An editor trying to read several submissions from established authors, answer agents' phone calls or queries, and juggle all of this to fit this month's budget will rarely be in a mood, or have the time to read from the slush pile.

I understand what it would cost to hire a staff of readers or editors to go through the slush pile. But you used to do it. If you would look at something other than profits, you might be able to do it again.

Charles Miller
Dallas, TX.

It isn't the checking off that takes time and effort, dear sir! It is 1) deciding just which little phrase is most appropriate, and 2) thinking, once again, whether you ought to include a phrase that reads "hopeless." As for Shawna's reading every word of every submission, that is, I agree, impossible. It is also unnecessary. Shawna is a good editor and, as another good editor once said, "You don't have to eat all of an egg to know it's rotten."

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Ms. McCarthy;

I have just read a number of letters objecting to the form letter sent out with rejected manuscripts and I would like to add my vote to theirs. In particular, I would like to challenge two statements you made in response: namely, that the earlier and more informative system required eight people reading the 'slush,' and that you yourself question the helpfulness of a pre-printed general comment.

I earn my living in another artistic field (which I also teach) and I firmly believe that the hardest skill to master is not that of creativity, but that of objective observation. It is easy to turn out a science fiction story, and I'm sure at some point most fans do. It's another thing entirely to sit down with it and say 'what needs to be fixed?', 'what have I poured out from my guts that just won't work?', or the hardest of all—'this is awful, I need to start over!' Learning to see one's own work objectively and to discard well beloved parts in favor of the greater whole is a crucial process in any artistic field.

Your form letter offers a particularly seductive escape from this responsibility, namely the section at the bottom that explains that even good stories may be rejected if they "fail to rise far enough above the other 849." It was once demonstrated that a majority of people tend to classify themselves as 'slightly above average.' I contend that a fledgling young writer in bad need of work on basic writing skills is very capable of fitting himself into this last category, and thus refusing once more to take a good hard look at a story which

should not be a failure so much as a learning experience.

While not necessarily more compassionate, some kind of limited response sheet would be infinitely more constructive. Even categories amounting to 'really bad,' 'work on your English,' and 'poor characterization,' painful criticisms though they are, would force the beginner to reassess what he obviously thought was outstanding (or he wouldn't have submitted it). That 'bleeding,' as one reader called it, is a necessary part of artistic growth, and I deeply regret that you no longer offer it.

As to the effort involved, I think you are mistaken. It may be true that once eight people collaborated on a truly objective opinion-form, but this isn't necessarily a requirement. I myself respect the position you are in and the experience that implies, and would welcome just your own opinion on any item I submitted; while the added opinion of seven of your colleagues would be undeniably better, no criticism at all is infinitely worse.

I urge you to reconsider adopting some kind of check list, which might require no more than an instant for you to mark what bothered you most (or if a story really did fall into that last preferable category) but which would be of tremendous value to those of your readers who are trying to learn the art of writing, and who need to see their attempts at least once through someone else's eyes.

Sincerely,

Celia S. Friedman
Shenandoah College and
Conservatory of Music
Winchester, VA 22601

Dear me, is there no one who understands the function of an editor? An editor is not a writing-teacher for the thousands of aspiring writers. She isn't paid enough and there's no way to create enough time. And yet she does make comment where she feels the writer shows promise. —You know, I feel bad about this but truth is truth, most aspiring writers don't show promise.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editors, Staff, and the Good Doctor,

Back in 1979–80, I was the Proud Possessor of a subscription to your magazine. At the time, I was a high school sophomore and my favorite time of the month was the arrival of each new issue. I was impressed by the appeals for new writers, entertained by the puns, and loved the art work. But, being an unemployed student meant having a lack of money, and I allowed my subscription to lapse.

The small town I lived in at the time didn't carry your magazine. In fact, one store manager told me "If it ain't real, then it ain't any good." (The thing I remember most about that quote was that he was standing next to a rack full of "National Enquirer" magazines as he said it.) Needless to say, I didn't see a copy of your mag for the rest of high school.

After graduation, I was too busy with college courses, projects and whatnot to pick up a copy of your magazine. Well, two days ago, I found the time, picked one up and read it from cover to cover without stopping. I am impressed!

I won't comment about the good stories in the August '84 issue. After all, you'll get enough letters praising Frederick Pohl, Barbara Owens, and everybody else. Instead, I will pick on two things I didn't like.

First: "The Fermi Paradox." I don't know if you ran that as a joke, but it reminded me of the old geocentric theory in astronomy: Earth is the most important and everything revolves around it. Dr. Gillett's permutation of this theory comes across as "Only humans are intelligent and the universe revolves around us." Even though he hasn't been to every planet, Gillett would make a judgement on very shaky logic and almost no hard evidence. He says that since we haven't been visited, we never will. And since we never will, then other intelligences don't exist. Sorry, Dr. Gillett, but that syllogism doesn't work out. It's like saying that since I, Howard, have never been hit by a car, then I never will be. And since I never will be hit by a car, then cars don't exist.

Besides, my logic instructor gave me one important rule: trying to prove that something doesn't exist is impossible. Do you not believe me? Then prove to me that Santa Claus does not live at the North Pole.

Dr. Gillett's theory reminds me very much of some Creationist dogma: excessive pride in humans ("We are above everything else.").

Enough of attacking Dr. Gillett. Now to what is to me a more important gripe: WHERE ARE THE PUNS? Have you stopped publishing them, or were they simply crowded out of the August issue?

Or do you just run them sporadically to keep the readers from burning out on them? Or burning them?

To sum it up, even including my gripes, the magazine is even better than when I was first initiated. I am enclosing the familiar SASE for the manuscript guide.
Mazel tov!

Howard Warren
Russellville, AR

If the magazine is better now, as you say it is, then the responsibility is clearly Shawna's. She does the work. But there's a price. Whereas George Scithers adored puns, Shawna does not, and I don't dare cross her in this. Good editors (and beauteous, too) are very hard to get, and you want to keep them when you've got them.

—Isaac Asimov

Dr. Asimov and Shawna:

Recently in "Letters to the Editor," from a person confined to a wheelchair, there was a complaint about stories not having a disabled being in them. I remember several stories, and that will tell my age as I started reading SF in the 1940s, and one of them was the story of Waldo, another was Robbie the Robot. *The Green Hills of Earth* had a blind man in it, Rhisling I think was his name. Excuse me I am one of those persons myself who has to live a very sedentary life and it isn't any fun and very, very boring.

Like a lady said, if there is a choice, better sex than war. I read lots of the Space Legion stories and still like them, but I can do without the wars in space or anywhere for

that matter. I've spent enough time in the real thing, now guns scare me and I do not like movies that depict war or violence of any sort.

Keep up the good work and the stories coming for all of us old fans. My sincerest thanks:

Ebb T. Watson

You are right. Now that I think of it, Heinlein did have handicapped people now and then. There was a very powerful portrait of one in Citizen of the Galaxy, if I remember correctly. And, like you, I prefer sex to war, too. I suppose there are some people who prefer war to sex, but I am fortunate in that I've never met one.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov:

This is a letter I have been meaning to sit down and write for some time, and now at 1:00 in the morning I find I have the time to write it. (Have you also noticed that the more time passes by, the shorter the days become?)

Matter of the First Part (which has nothing to do with why I originally wanted to write you): I have just finished reading your editorial in the August 1984 of *IASf Magazine* entitled, "The Faces of Science Fiction." As one of your readers for most of the 45 years you have been writing, I thank you for your comments.

Matter of the Second Part (which is the real reason why I sat down to write this letter): If I recall correctly, for most of the 45 years you have been writing, you have had an ongoing argument with your readers as to the proper definition



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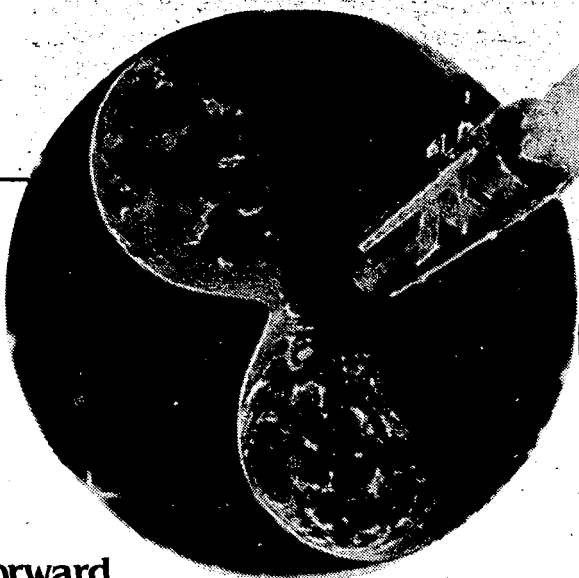
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of science fiction. By your leave, after four and one-half decades, I would also like to enter into this argument.

I would like to submit the following definition as that which defines science fiction from other works of literature. It is from what is now a well-known quotation from the play *John Bull's Other Island*, by George Bernard Shaw:

Some men see things as they are and say, "why?" I dream of things that never were and say, "why not?"

I think this quotation is self-explanatory, and I consider it such a good definition of what defines science fiction that I will even forgive Mr. Shaw for using the word "men" instead of "people."

Very truly yours,

Toni Goss
Honolulu, HI

P.S. I also do not like having my photograph taken for about the same reasons as do you, the irony being I am a professional photographer.

Odd, but while I know the quotation well, I somehow never thought of it as Shavian. I am under the impression it was said by someone else, but I can't think who (I hate not-remembering) and, of course, I may be wrong. Can anyone help?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editor,

After reading Dr. Gillett's fine "Viewpoint: The Fermi Paradox," I feel he has only increased the mystery of this topic which repeatedly manifests itself, usually in an argument to cease the SETI effort.

But I wonder, are we not looking for a form of life that is *transient* in its very nature? For how many decades have we been radiating energy, and for how many more, until we cease radiating (wasteful, you know) and thus become invisible to neighbors? Giving three hundred years at the most (a WAG, of course), this is not even an eye-blink in the cosmos; perhaps several such eyeblinks have occurred and we missed them.

Furthermore, while I personally prefer a "Star Trek" universe full of warm-blooded, furry mammals and feathered avians, having adventures and intrigues, I propose that spaceships themselves will become obsolete as a form of transportation. If mortal flesh stands in the way of faster traveling; well, it won't for long!

I am a computer programmer/analyst, and hence logical and one would not expect me to be religious, but I am. I believe the universe is full of life, I *want* it to be full of life, but I feel that SETI will fail and Dr. Gillett will prove himself right, to himself, simply because of the conditions placed upon the search itself: other life closely approximating *Homo sapiens* enough to use broadcast electromagnetic radiation and/or spaceships. I suppose at this moment in the visible universe *we are the only ones* in that particular phase, but that there have been others, and will be others.

I propose, therefore, that we not ask *where are they*, but ask, *what have they become?*

Sincerely,

Michael Gordon
Pearl Harbor, HI

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An interesting view, but it is possible to feel that the laws of nature represent restraints that are absolute. In other words, no matter what a species becomes, the speed-of-light limit, and the laws of thermodynamics, and quantum theory and relativity remain. What is flatly impossible will stay flatly impossible. It's a dull point of view but it may just possibly be correct.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Editors:

Obviously, Lillian Stewart Carl is not a chess player. In "From the Labyrinth of Night" (August, 1984 issue) she has the robot Irene giving chess instructions to the man David, and "First move," Irene said. "Pawn to King Two." An obvious error, for anyone who knows anything about the game. The pawns start on the second row, and a pawn on King Two can not move to King Two.

Otherwise, it was a very enjoyable story. The concept of researchers discovering traces of a primitive form of life within the rocks on Mars and being elated that "We are not alone" is quite thought-provoking. We could follow that onwards: the EPA forces a ban on construction on Mars, to protect the Martian form of life, but some work is done anyway, so that the evolution of that life form is accelerated, and years later becomes a highly intelligent species, but totally inimical to Earth life forms, and wipes out all other life forms in the universe. (Or any other alternative development—such as a benign species that fosters the evolution of other life forms).

Anyway, tell your authors to do a little research before using an existing game in a story, to avoid making such an obvious blunder.

Ben Johnson
213 Coventry Drive
Campbell, CA 95008

I agree that it is an obvious error so that I doubt Carl made it. I suspect that it was a typo (either hers or the printers') and that it just got past the proof-reading. Ah, if you had the experience I have had of the embarrassing things that get past the proof-reading!

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Sir,

I never write letters but the August issue forces me to comment.

No story since "Enemy Mine" has been so vivid, so personal, so fitting to the possibilities of our age as "Realtime."

Bravo.

Robert Gibbs
14186 SW 275 St.
Naranja, FL 33032

Short and sweet. Thank you.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Shawna:

I've just finished reading the September '84 issue of *IASfm*, and I must say I'm depressed. Why were so many of the stories downcast and melancholic?

The writing and content (as usual) was superb, but can we have more happy endings? Every now and then? Please?

Ross L. Mattis
Smithfield, RI

Believe me, I sympathize. First thing I do every morning is read the New York Times very carefully, and I end up depressed. I suspect the writers generally get depressed for the same reason and it shows up in their writing.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov, Ms. McCarthy, et al.:

Knowing from one of the stories of his early youth ("The Up-to-Date Sorcerer," *F&SF*, ca. 1958) that the good Dr. A. is acquainted with the works of G & S, I offer the following quotation as a comment on a recent G & A story ("Writing Time," *IASfm*, July, 1984):

Oh, don't the days seem lank
and long

When all goes right and nothing
goes wrong?

And isn't your life extremely
flat

With nothing whatever to
grumble at?

(King Gama's song, Act III, *Princess Ida*, by Gilbert and Sullivan.)

You publish a fine magazine, with a variety of content. I like variety, and applaud your successful efforts to offer a little something for everyone.

Dr. David W. Pease
Terre Haute, IN

If every letter was as kindly as yours then perhaps I might find out the dangers of lankness and longness as a result of having nothing whatever to grumble at. On the whole, though, I think I can rely on our letter-writing readers not to let that happen.

—Isaac Asimov

ABOUT AN OLD CLOSET

Don't open the door to the closet under the stairs. A nova is hidden there and a couple of planets bearing unspeakable forms of life, also a magic sword named Gorisgood and three aphrodisiacs with a sweet smell of sin. A handy gold-plated rocket ship and its seventy-seven laser bolts are concealed behind an invisible time-machine, while Hanna-Hanna, Grandmother of All, sits in the gloom on her altar of bones, but don't open the door expecting to master the beautiful blunt hard edge of truth.

—Hope Athearn

GAMING

by Dana Lombardy

What do you do when there's no one available with whom to play a game? Solitaire isn't always the best answer. Some games, especially fantasy and SF role-games, are more fun when played with a gamemaster or referee and other adventurers.

Play-by-mail (PBM) games are an interesting and enjoyable alternative for gamers who want to play—but can't always find other gamers available at the right time.

PBM games aren't new. Chess and other abstract strategy games have been played through the mail for many years. When wargames were introduced more than twenty years ago, play-by-mail kits were also made available for most of these board games. Sometimes, it seemed, the only way to find an opponent for a wargame was to run a classified ad in a gaming newsletter and then PBM.

That's not necessary today. Hundreds of gamers are available in almost every major city if you need players to defend a galaxy, steal a magical sword, retrieve a kidnapped spy, or start a military campaign. Unfortunately, these gamers may not be around when you need them. And sometimes, it's more interesting to play against gamers in other cities who don't know your favorite strategies, and whose unfamiliar tactical moves may be a refreshing challenge for you. For these reasons, play by mail has become a growing

form of gaming in the past few years.

Chess and other board games are still played through the mail, but most of the new PBM designs deal with fantasy and SF role-playing. In role-games, you play a character, such as a starship captain, a wizard, a barbarian, etc., and the gamemaster (referee), often assisted by his computer, gives you the results of your moves and decisions. In some PBM games, you play solitaire against the gamemaster/computer, while other games join players in several different cities into one adventure party on a quest or a mission.

There's not enough space in this column to go into detail on every PBM game you can play, but a free pamphlet is available for readers who'd like to know more about these games. You can obtain one by writing me at *IASfm*, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017.

There's also several good gaming magazines that cover PBM games (send \$3.00 for a sample copy), including: *Gaming Universal*, Box 437, Hawley, PA 18428; *Flagship*, Flying Buffalo Inc., Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252; *Space Gamer*, Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760; and *Dragon*, Box 110, Lake Geneva, WI 53147.

There are so many different types of PBM games available, you should be able to find one that fits your interests. The following list is provided as a starting point. Good luck, and

THE BEST IN PBM

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Beyond the Stellar Empire (BSE) is a science fiction role-playing game of unparalleled scope. You assume the persona of an interstellar starship captain interacting in the most detailed play-by-mail game ever created. BSE has it all; a multitude of unique solar systems composed of individually designed worlds, politics, and diplomacy, realistic economics and logistics, a comprehensive combat system, chartered companies and Imperial services, alien races, and exploration, invasion, and colonization of hostile planets.

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Beyond the Stellar Empire was chosen by editors of *GAMES* magazine as one of the top 100 games for both 1983 and 1984, the only PBM game so honored.

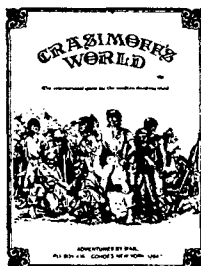
Complete Rules Package costs \$5.00. Starter Package costs \$17.00 and includes rules package, set-up, and two turns.



CRASIMOFF'S WORLD

Crasimoff's World is a PBM game of extraordinary quality and detail. Lead your party of fighters, magic users and priests through a fantastic land filled with adventure, magic, and danger. Each party member has a wide range of attributes and possessions. Loot dungeons, redeem swampmen heads for bounty, explore ancient ruins, raid dwarven encampments, and battle hill trolls in their underground domain. The world is complete in every detail; history, ecology, mythos, geography, and much, much more.

Complete Rules Package costs \$3.00. Starter Package costs \$15. -includes rules package, set-up, and two turns.



CAPITOL

Capitol is a fast playing strategic space warfare game that divides players into teams, pitting them against each other in an orgy of xenophobic fury. Capitol is unique in that it is a perfect introductory game for an individual new to play-by-mail games while at the same time detailed enough for the most experienced gamer.

Complete Rules Package costs \$2.50. Starter Package costs \$16.00 and includes rules package, set-up, and four turns.

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good gaming!

Advent Games, Box 81674, Lincoln, NE 68501. *Takamo* strategic game of space exploration and conquest.

Adventure Systems, 1669 South Voss, Suite FF, Houston, TX 77057. *Illuminati* solitaire SF card game, based on award-winner by SJ Games.

Adventures By Mail, Box 424, Cohoes, NY 12047. *Beyond the Stellar Empire*, *Capitol*, and *Crasimoff's World* SF games.

Adventures Design Group Inc., Box 821072, Dallas, TX 75382. *Lords of the Dark Horse* fantasy game.

Athena Games, Box 9, Ames, IA 50010. *Kings & Castles* medieval historical strategy game.

Rick Barr, Box 1873, Cave Creek, AZ 85331. *Moneylender* Italian Renaissance game, and *Armageddon*, *Stellar Empire*, and *CRISIS* SF games.

Richard R. Breton, 1526 Sherri Lane, Boulder City, NV 89005. *Sarakond Campaign* ancient historical game.

C-T Simulations, Box 174A, Friendswood, TX 77546. *Star Cluster Omega* SF exploration game.

Central Texas Computing, Box 2281, Austin, TX 78768. *Universe III* strategic SF space conquest game.

Clemens & Associates Inc., Box 4539, San Clemente, CA 92672. *Universe II* SF starship game, and *Terra II* and *Conquest of Insula II*.

Comstar Enterprises, Box 560892, Miami, FL 33256. *World of Velgor* fantasy role-game.

Empire Games Inc., Box 6681, Denver, CO 80206. *Realms of Sword and Thunder* ancient Britain game.

Entertainment Concepts Inc., 6923 Pleasant Drive, Charlotte, NC 28211. *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*®

and *Silverdawn* fantasy role-games, *Starquest* SF role-game, *Spirit of Glory* 1920's-30's role-game, *Special Assignment* espionage role-game, and *Power: the Star Throne Beckons* SF strategy game.

Fantastic Simulations, Box 24566, Denver, CO 80224. *Fleet Maneuvers* tactical starship game.

Flying Buffalo Inc., Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252 (the oldest company doing computer-moderated PBM games). *Starweb*, *Galactic Conflict*, and *Starlord* SF games, *Heroic Fantasy* and *Treacherous Trajans* Trap fantasy games, *Battle Plan*, and *Nuclear Destruction* contemporary strategy games.

Galactic Empires, Box 1005, Fairborn, OH 45324. *Galactic Empires* and *Galaxy Two* SF strategy games.

Game Systems Inc., Box 431166, Miami, FL 33243. *Earthwood* strategic fantasy game, and *Dawn of the Ancients* ancient strategy game.

The Gamesmiths, 105 Vista del Campo, Los Gatos, CA 95030. *SKAAL* fantasy role-game.

Graaf Simulations, 27530 Harper Ave., St. Clair Shores, MI 48081. *Feudal Lords* strategy game of post-King Arthur England.

JF&L, 305 East Caffery, Pharr, TX 78577. *Quest for Adventure*, *Quest II*, *Quest III*, and *Magic Duel* fantasy role-games, *New World*, *StarQuest*, *Nexus Squad*, *Star Fleet Academy*, *Warlord of Jarnel*, and *The Hunt* SF role-games.

For a free pamphlet with more information on these PBM games, write to Dana Lombardy, Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, 380 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10017. ●

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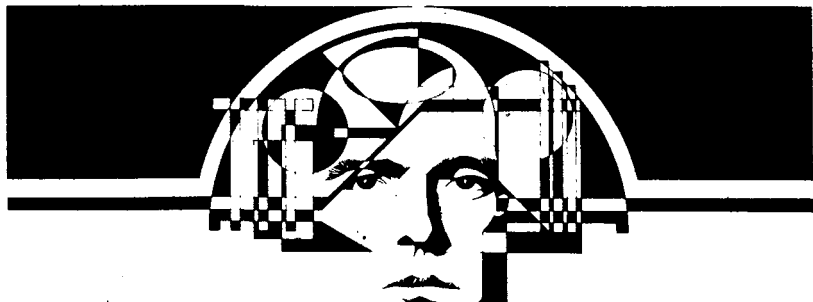
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MARTIN GARDNER

HOW'S-THAT-AGAIN FLANAGAN



I've known a number of top science fiction writers in my day, but none whose conversation was more bewildering than that of Fred Flanagan. You won't recognize his name because Fred writes under a dozen pseudonyms. His novels and stories are noted for their wild cosmologies and their bizarre planets. He acquired the unusual nickname of How's-That-Again, or Howse for short, when he was a student at the Bronx High School of Science. The name reflected his habit of perpetually making such curious, outlandish remarks that listeners frequently responded with "How's that again?"

A few months ago I visited Flanagan at what he called the "Howse house" on the shore of Paradox Lake, a small lake in Essex County, New York, about six miles west of the upper Hudson River. Although only in his mid-forties, Fred had grown a long beard that he bleached white to make him look like a Zen sage. To avoid the nuisance of washing his hair and having it cut he shaved his head every few days.

"Those jeans you're wearing," I said, pointing to his feet, "are awfully narrow at the bottoms. How do you manage to get your feet through them?"

"I don't," he said. "I put 'em on over my head."

I should explain that Fred had inherited from his Irish immigrant parents a fondness for Irish bulls. I once asked him why he and his ex-

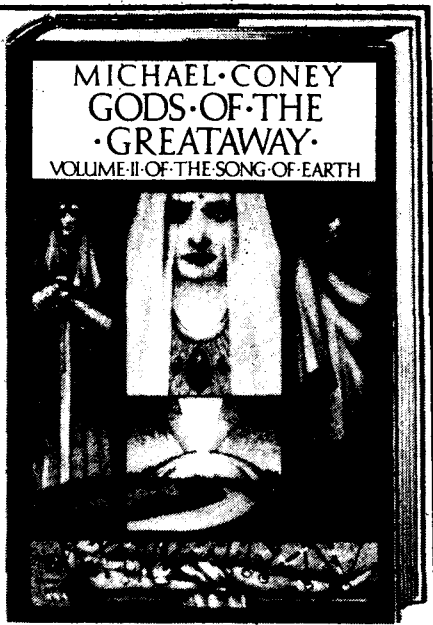
"It is mind-boggling!"

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wife never had any children. "Sterility," he replied. "My wife was unable to conceive. She inherited the disability from her mother."

"How's that again?" I remember asking.

We were paddling about Paradox Lake in Flanagan's canoe when I brought up the Kaluza-Klein theory, a strange conjecture that I discussed at some length in my *Ambidextrous Universe*. I call it strange because it posits a fourth spatial dimension that curves back on itself like a circle, but with a diameter much shorter than the radius of an atom! Einstein had rejected the theory, and I never expected it would ever be revived. To my vast surprise, a generalized Kaluza-Klein theory, with more spatial dimensions than four, is now a hot topic in the latest GUTs (Grand Unification Theories) that are attempting to unify all the forces of nature and to explain the quantum properties of all the fundamental particles.

"I'm not surprised at all," said Flanagan. "Spacetime has to be at least five-dimensional because it's easy to show that a cube has four space dimensions."

"How's that again?"

"Consider a square," Fred said. "Its two diagonals are perpendicular to each other. This proves a square is two-dimensional. Now take a cube. It has four space diagonals, each joining opposite pairs of corners. As you can easily see, any two space diagonals are perpendicular to one another.

Of course four mutually perpendicular lines can be drawn only in four-dimensional space."

I was about to make a comment, but Flanagan interrupted. "Do you know what a naked singularity is?"

I nodded. "Some cosmologists think a collapsing star can form something much worse than a black hole. It's a singularity in spacetime that is 'unclothed,' so to speak, by a black hole. Light can spiral around it and escape."

"Precisely," Fred said. "A Cambridge cosmologist named George Ellis has based a marvelous model of the universe on a naked singularity. He assumes that the universe is the surface of a vast four-dimensional sphere, like some early models, only the sphere is not expanding."

"Then how does Ellis explain the red shift?" I asked. "As you know, it's the shifting of the spectrum of distant stars toward the red that is the strongest evidence for an expanding universe."

"Nonsense," said Flanagan. "There are dozens of ways to explain the red shift. Ellis accounts for it this way. Our Milky Way galaxy is at a spot on the hypersphere's surface exactly opposite a monstrous naked singularity. The monster pulls into itself all the matter that is spewing out from exploding supernovae and other cosmic events. It transforms this matter into hydrogen, which it spews out again. This recycling of matter keeps the cosmos in a steady state."

"And the red shift?"

"I'm coming to that. The more distant a galaxy is from us the closer it is to the naked singularity. The intense gravity field around the singularity shifts starlight toward the red. The closer a star is to the monster, the greater the shift. For observers on earth this creates the illusion of an expanding universe. If we could look at our galaxy from a planet nearer the singularity we would see the light blue-shifted."

"Wouldn't it be an unbelievable coincidence that our galaxy and the singularity are antipodal?"

"Not at all," said Flanagan. "Only a galaxy that far from the singularity would be cool enough to allow life to evolve. We're here because we couldn't have evolved anywhere else."

"And you take all this seriously?"

"It's the best model we have. Of course it has one great weakness. It assumes that gravity is an attractive force."

"How's that again?"

"Haven't you ever wondered why a gas-filled balloon rises?"

"It's gravity pulling the air down and creating pressure on the underside."

"But that's absurd," said Flanagan. "There's just as much air pressure pushing down on the top of the balloon. There may be a slight difference

between the pressure above and below, but this is much too small to make a balloon rise as fast as it does. No, the balloon is pushed up by gravity."

"But if gravity pushes it up," I said, "what makes a stone fall?"

"It's the enormous pressure of all the countless billions upon billions of virtual particles that keep bubbling up in the quantum foam of the so-called vacuum of space."

I decided to change the subject. "Are there any fish in this lake?"

"Plenty," said Fred. "But I never fish. I hate fishing, and what's more, I'm glad I hate it."

"How come?"

"Because," he said, "if I liked to fish I'd be spending lots of time fishing, and that would bore me to death. One of my neighbors loves to fish. Unfortunately, he lost his left arm in an auto accident many years ago so he has to fish with one hand. The other day he told me he caught a fish so big . . ."

Flanagan put his left arm behind his back to imitate a one-armed man. Then he extended his right hand, palm to the left, to show how big the fish was.

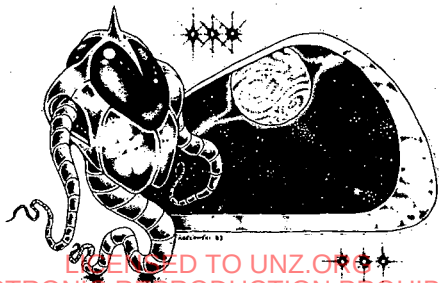
"By the way," he said, "this canoe reminds me of a clever word problem your readers might enjoy. Ask them if they can rearrange the letters of CANOE to make another common English word."

A few days after I returned home I received a postcard from Flanagan. On the address side was pasted a small sticker that said: "Please notify the post office immediately if this sticker has fallen off in transit." On the back of the card was typed:

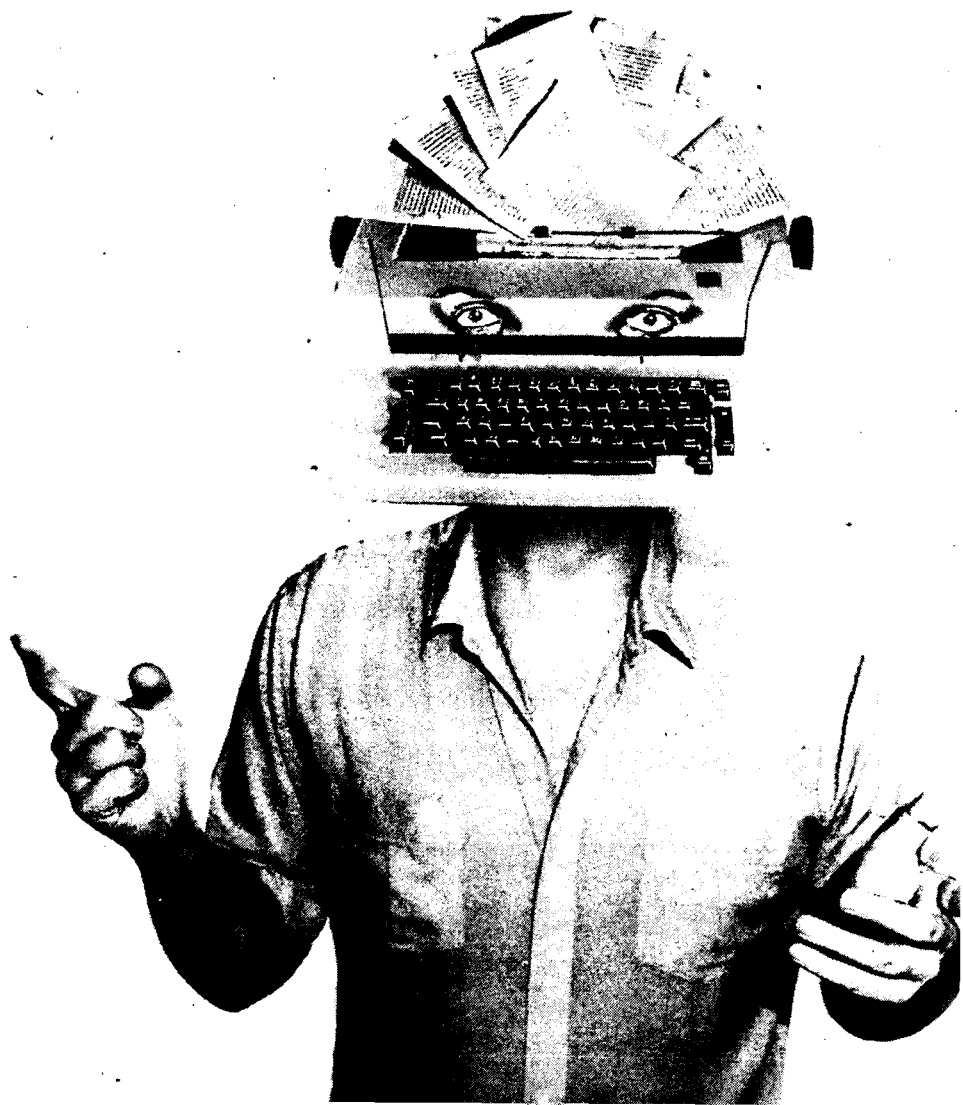
Don't waste your time reading this.

It doesn't say anything.

No answers this month. It should be easy to figure out the flimflam about the cube, to explain why balloons rise, and to find an anagram for CANOE. As for George Ellis, he really is a distinguished British cosmologist whose model has been put forth seriously. You can find out more about it in Paul Davies's 1981 book *The Edge of Infinity*. ●



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VIEWPOINT

HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION: A STUDENT PERSPECTIVE ON CLARION

art: J.K. Potter

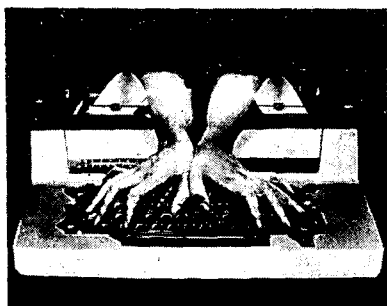
by Lucius Shepard

Last June we featured a Viewpoint, "Clarifying Clarion" by Algis Budrys, which discussed what it was like to teach science fiction, and especially what it was like to teach it at the Clarion SF Writing Workshop. In the Viewpoint that follows, Lucius Shepard gives us a look at Clarion from the other side of the desk.

VIEWPOINT

During the summer of 1980 I attended the Clarion workshop at Michigan State University in East Lansing. All I knew about the program was that it had a reputation for turning out writers who sold their work, and that I had enjoyed the work of many of its graduates—Vonda McIntyre, Ed Bryant, and Kim Stanley Robinson, to name but a few. In addition I had heard rumors to the effect that Clarion was an Experience, a quasi-mystical process that could Change Your Life, but I gave these rumors little credence. I was looking forward to a boring yet productive six weeks.

On the Sunday evening prior to the beginning of the program, an introductory meeting was held in the workshop room—a basement classroom with linoleum floors and the sort of fluorescent lighting that makes pores look like blackheads. I arrived late and found about twenty people (eighteen, to be exact) sitting around a trashcan filled with beer and ice. They all seemed ill at ease, boys sitting with boys,



“If you are so disposed, and sometimes even if you are not, Clarion can be a life in miniature, a compressed existence rather like a long sea voyage—a combination Ship Of Fools and Paper Chase, with all the attendant emotionality and grave consequences. It can transport you from one landfall to another in your moral and intellectual universe, and at the end of the voyage you will realize that it was a very smooth transition, with hardly a sensation of motion.”

girls with girls, and I recall thinking that they were an unprepossessing lot. The program administrator—an MSU professor—suggested that we take turns introducing ourselves; I noticed that several of the group adopted God-help-us expressions in response. At that stage we were rivals, and this enforced familiarity went against our desire for anonymity and distance. When it came my turn I mumbled my name with bad grace; a bearded guy across from me said in a deep-fried southern accent and with what struck me as an insulting tone, "What'd he say?" I repeated myself with the precision of speech one uses when addressing a child, and the guy rolled his eyes and glanced away. Thoroughly paranoid, I made a vow. I would write twenty-four hours a day, never leaving my room, and dazzle these oafs and oafettes with my brilliant prose. I paid no attention to the rest of the introductions.

At the first workshop session the next morning our instructor—a genteel drill sergeant named Robin Scott Wilson—eviscerated one of the

submission stories that had accompanied our applications to the program, and generally put the fear of God into us. Suddenly there was pressure. Nobody wanted to be made to look as inept as the author of that initial story had been. We were all living on the fifth floor of a graduate residence hall, and if you were to walk down the hallway at almost any time of day or night you would hear typewriters chattering away like speed-freak squirrels. People bolted their meals and fled back to their rooms to write, and during the workshop sessions our critiques grew heated, reflecting the intensity with which we were starting to burn ourselves out. This manic intensity is the hallmark of every Clarion; it stems from the fact that with rare exceptions all the students are dead-serious about writing as a career, about changing their lives at least to the extent of becoming a writer. The intensity generated by the work and by the self-examination necessary to the work spills over into the other facets of your day-to-day, and so, as that first week progressed, the

VIEWPOINT

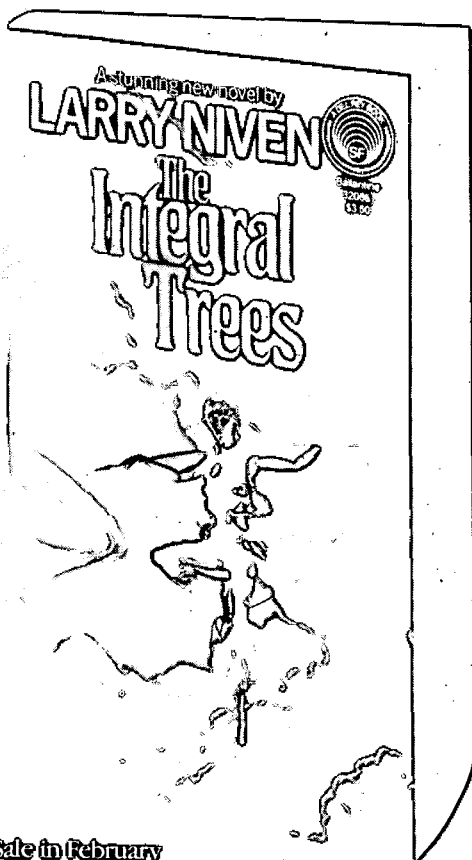
barriers between the students in my group began to erode.

Take any nineteen men and women, ship them off to East Lansing (a town which—though not devoid of entertainment—is not the Paris of the Midwest), ask them to pay a thousand dollars or so for the privilege, put them under pressure from their instructors and their peers, place them in an intimate living situation, and you cannot expect other than that some of them will slip into intimate associations. Some will get married, some will get unmarried, others will enter into less decisive relationships, and others yet will somehow manage to avoid this and pass through the six weeks without forming any serious attachments. This is neither the point nor the main business of Clarion, but it is symptomatic of and adds to the intensity. And the tenor of both these relationships and non-relationships will often color the workshopping process itself, in that certain people may become hesitant to criticize certain other people's stories—a fact that will be pointed out with some acerbity by others in the group.

Despite my desire to remain isolated I couldn't help noticing what an odd mixture we were—a computer programmer; a poet; a lawyer with her twelve-year-old daughter in tow; a faculty wife *sans* husband; a rock musician (myself); a couple of college students; a devotee of the occult who believed thunder was the work of warlocks and held parties in her room during storms to help ward off evil energies; a sculptress; a hardcore science fiction fan; and so forth. All of them having affiliations with people now hundreds and thousands of miles away, all beginning to like or dislike each other . . . intensely.

Each pair of rooms shared a bathroom, and in the room adjoining mine lived the computer programmer. I took to wandering into his room whenever I was stuck on a story. We had nothing in common, but we became friends. He was taciturn, I talkative; he neither drank nor smoked, I did both; his room was as neat as a pin, mine looked like the South Bronx after a paperstorm. By way of getting to know him I spilled things on

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his floor—ashes, beer, whatever—and he would familiarize himself with me by examining these spills as if they were the spoor of some strange, large animal. I also began to have long conversations with certain other of the students and following these conversations, I would sometimes achieve a distance from myself and realize that I had reached a pivotal point in life. I had never led the examined life, and thinking about these things unsettled me; to avoid thinking about them I threw myself into my work with almost a sense of desperation.

The process of burning-out at Clarion—of blocking, or arriving at a stage where everything you write seems inane, or simply giving up, usually doesn't occur *en masse* until the fourth week or thereabouts; but symptoms can be observed as early as week two. People wandering the halls, trailing their fingers along the walls like male and female Ophelias; people collapsed in front of their doors, staring at the carpet; people vaguing out in the midst of dinner, a forkful of the Owens Hall special suspended in

mid-air. There is a general onset of numbness and stupidity.

For example, one night I went onto the balcony to get some air and found one of the other guys gazing off into the distance. We exchanged pleasantries, and after a moment he said, "What's that?" and pointed. Beyond another residence hall was a stand of trees, and through the trees a weird silvery light was shining.

"Beats me," I said, bewildered. We discussed what it might be—a mother ship, someone having a remarkable religious experience—and when another student happened by we called to him and asked his opinion. He, too, was baffled. Eventually we gave up trying to understand it and returned to our rooms. About a half hour later I was struck by the absolute strangeness of that light. Christ! What had it been? I went back out to the balcony. The light was no longer behind the trees, but it was still in evidence above them—round and full and shining bright. The moon.

But the stupidity and numbness aside, I was learning from the workshop. I couldn't have told you then much of what

I was learning, however I had become sure of one thing already—I liked the act of writing, and that was something that had not been clear to me before coming to Clarion, because I had not had the discipline to try it on an everyday basis.

The instructor for the second week was Kit Reed, an intelligent, precise lady who would brook no nonsense. Called a spade a spade, she did, and her criticism was considered too harsh by several of the students. Arguments developed in the workshop sessions, and our own critiques of each other's stories tended toward the vicious. I was not looking forward to my private conference with Kit Reed, but when it occurred, she gave me so much encouragement that I walked away from the instructor's apartment feeling that I was already an established author. I took her statements about my work and polished them in my mind until they fairly sparkled. If I could have pinned them on my chest I would have.

A.J. Budrys was the third instructor, and he intimidated the hell out of us. He looked like



"At Clarion I learned not to write but how to approach the act and art of writing, how to embrace discipline and how to effect a career. I entered into a community of writers that over the past years has provided valuable support, even to the extent of supplying a roof over my head from time-to-time."

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Hemingway, he was an Authority In The Field, and everything he said had the weight of pronouncement. All Kit Reed's encouragement of me suddenly seemed an act of kindness on her part rather than one of critical acumen. Some of us haunted his apartment, drinking beer and listening to him hold forth, hoping to pick up some clue as to how we could raise ourselves to his level.

I think my respect for AJ stood me in good stead, because my attitude allowed me to listen without defensiveness and I learned more during that week than any other.

Concurrent with AJ's appearance there was a change in our group. Though there had been differences between various of us, these had been subsumed by a unity of purpose and circumstance; that unity was now fraying, allowing jealousies and incompatibilities to surface. There was an increase of malicious gossip, incidents of emotional treachery and backbiting. The two largest males engaged in a wrestling match that bordered on real violence;

the lawyer's twelve-year-old-daughter took to bopping me on the head with her baton. By the end of the week things had come to a peculiar pass. Due to the intensity of these weeks, time had stretched. It was impossible to believe that only twenty-one days had gone by; it seemed years, and for many of us our past lives seemed distant and unreal. If you are so disposed, and sometimes even if you are not, Clarion can be a life in miniature, a compressed existence rather like a long sea voyage—a combination Ship Of Fools and Paper Chase, with all the attendant emotionality and grave consequences. It can transport you from one landfall to another in your moral and intellectual universe, and at the end of the voyage you will realize that it was a very smooth transition, with hardly a sensation of motion. And now, at mid-point of that voyage, we were having to deal with one another as if we were permanent fixtures in each other's lives. Of course in some instances this sense of permanency was false—I will never see certain of my fellow

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students again, while others I see frequently. At any rate, my point is that many of us were now living life as if it did not exist beyond the limits of Clarion, and for myself I was coming to understand that I was not going to be able to return to what had been. I was not alone in this realization, and as a result whenever we broke from writing, all our interactions and parties took on a new character, one of hysterical fervor and silliness. Practical jokes abounded, as did water fights and acts of resistance against the administrator in charge of the residence hall, a taurine individual who sent Arab students to spy upon our evil-doings. It was as if some of us were trying to deny that anything serious was happening. And yet through all this we kept writing . . . until the fourth week and burn-out set in.

Our instructor that week was Avram Davidson, who was something of an idol of mine, yet neither I nor the rest of the students did well by him. We produced little work and attempted to blame this on his

attitude toward us, which could be harshly critical. During his week, though not as a direct result of his residency, the group disintegrated. People skipped class, couples wandered off for days on end. I took long walks, I sat and stared at my typewriter. During one of these spells of sitting and staring I felt a sudden onset of vertigo—it was as if the entire building were swaying. I attributed this to lack of sleep, my run-down health, and disoriented emotional state.

Later, however, I found out there had been a mild earth tremor. Quite a few of the residents in the building had been frightened, but those of us in the Clarion program had either disregarded or failed to notice it—and this we chalked up to the fact that we had all grown accustomed to feeling the earth move.

With the arrival of Damon Knight and Kate Wilhelm the following Sunday, our unity began to be restored. This was partly Damon-and-Kate's doing—they were used to coming in and putting the workshop back together under worse circumstances—but it was also

because their presence was an intimation that Clarion was soon going to end, and most of us did not want it to end. It seemed unreasonable that these people with whom we had become close should return to lives that had no reality for the rest of us. While there remained a bit of divisiveness between those of us who had quarreled, there was during these final two weeks a gradual upwelling of sentimentality.

My first impression of Kate Wilhelm was that she was an elegant lady with whom one should not trifle; later, during a mass waterfight, this impression was borne out—while everyone else was drenched, she sat in the midst of the entire proceeding and did not get a drop on her. My first impression of Damon Knight was that he looked like a cross between a gremlin and Gandalf the Gray. My second impression of him was that he hit me in the nose with a superball; he regularly sent them bouncing around the room during workshop sessions, caring not where they wound up. Somehow these two, with their combination of

elegance and slapstick humor, conveyed to us a sense that we were all doing wonderfully well and energized us sufficiently to begin writing again. I'm not quite sure how they managed this, but manage it they did, and by the end of their initial week the atmosphere at Clarion was—more-or-less—sweetness and light.

Those last two weeks were a good time. I knew that soon I would have to face some difficult decisions, but I put them off; I wanted to make full use of the remainder of the workshop, to write, to enjoy the company of the others, and I succeeded in this. A couple of the students were disgruntled, feeling their work had been slighted; but for most of us it was a very good time. We were pleased with the results.

And what were those results?

Speaking statistically, over half my class have since become published writers—this with varying degrees of frequency and success; others have given up writing, and others yet have not given up but due to personal circumstances have been unable to focus on their careers. One

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marriage, two divorces, and several long-term relationships have also resulted.

Speaking personally, Clarion changed my life.

I don't say this with any great fervor, like some backwoods yokel with hands waving in the air, testifying to a golden light he has seen shining behind the corncrib. It is simply a matter of fact. At Clarion I learned not to write but how to approach the act and art of writing, how to embrace discipline and how to effect a career. I entered into a community of writers that over the past years has provided valuable support, even to the extent of supplying a roof over my head from time-to-time. As to my personal life, what happened to me would have happened eventually had I not attended the workshop, though it might have taken years instead of weeks to manifest. That one can end up married or divorced or otherwise involved is neither a reason to attend or not to attend Clarion. There is no weird magic in the

air, the charm and *elan* of East Lansing will not overwhelm you or elevate your consciousness to some romantic wavelength. Clarion will only work these changes if you are open and ready for change; if you are, then it will not enforce the changes but will afford you an opportunity to understand their necessity, to step outside the mold of your life and inspect it for flaws.

So, given all of this, is the workshop an Experience? Does it take its place alongside EST and Scientology as a means—legitimate or not—of realizing one's human potential? Is it ultra-mysterious, inexplicable? Not really.

It is merely six weeks of a summer that come and go, that leave you a thousand dollars or so poorer, richer by a fund of expertise and some very good friends, and at the end of which you will find yourself back at your point of origin somewhere in the packed masonry of states with, perhaps, a few hard decisions to make. ●

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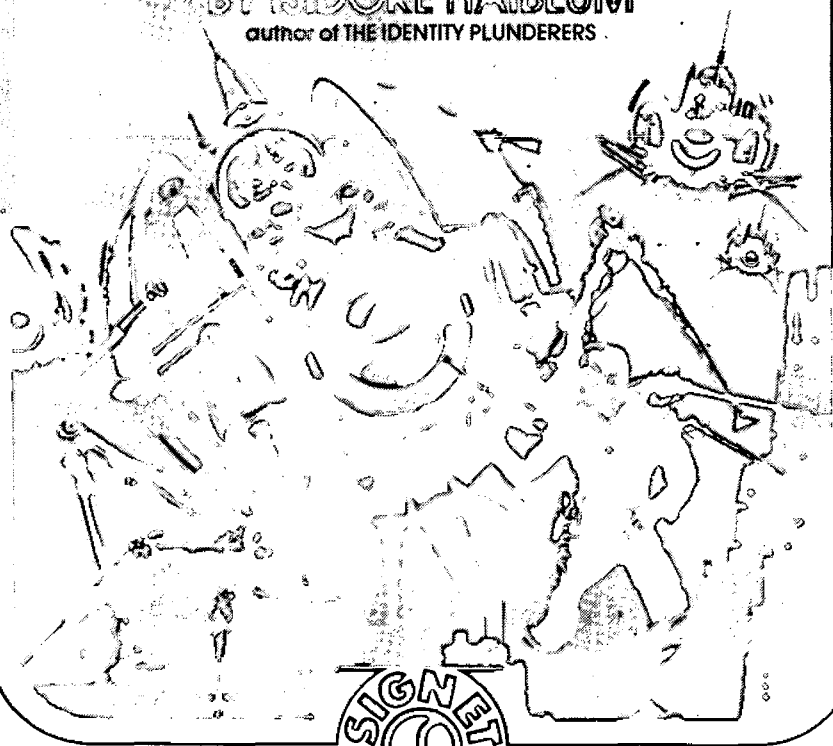
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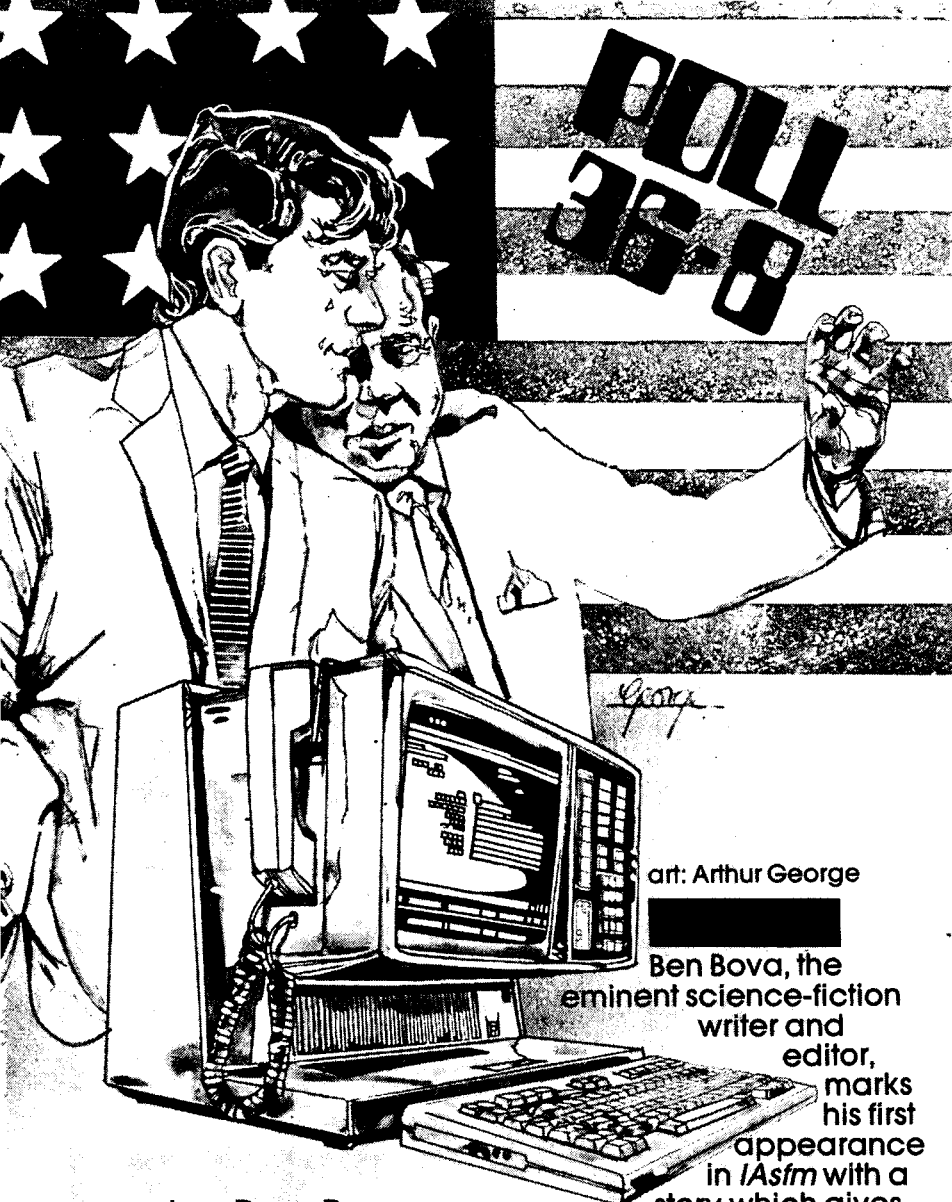
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PRIMARY

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So they bring us into the oval office and he sits himself down behind the big desk. It even has Harry Truman's old "The Buck Stops Here" sign on it.

He grins at that. He's good-looking, of course. Young, almost boyish, with that big flop of hair over his forehead that's become almost mandatory for any man who wants to be President of the United States. His smile is dazzling. Knocks women dead at forty paces. But his eyes are hard as diamond. He's no fool. He hasn't gotten into this office on that smile alone.

I want him to succeed. God knows we need a President who can succeed, who can pull this country together again and make us feel good about ourselves. But more than that, I want my program to succeed. Let him be the star of the press conferences. Let the women chase him. It's my program that's really at stake here, those intricate, invisible electronic swirls and bubbles that I'm carrying in my valise. That's what's truly important.

We're going to have a busy day.

There are four other people in the office with us, his closest aides and advisors: three men and one woman who have worked for him, bled for him, sweated for him since the days when he was a grassy-green, brand-new junior senator from Vermont. The men are his secretaries of Defense, Commerce, and the Treasury. The lone woman is his vice president, of course. There hasn't been a male Veep since the Eighties, a cause for complaint among some feminists who see themselves being stereotyped as perpetual Number Twos.

And me. I'm in the oval office too, with my valise full of computer program. But they hardly notice me. I'm just one of the lackeys, part of the background, like the portraits of former presidents on the walls or the model of the Mars Exploration Base that he insisted they set up on the table behind his desk, between the blue-and-gold curtained windows.

My job is to load my program disks into the White House mainframe computer, buried somewhere deep beneath the West Wing. He thinks of it as *his* program, *his* plans and techniques for running the country. But it's mine, my clever blend of hardware and software that will be the heart and brains and guts of this oval office.

I sit off to one side, so surrounded by display screens and keyboards that they can barely see the top of my balding head. That's okay. I like it here, barricaded behind the machines, sitting off alone like a church organist up in his secret niche. I can see them, all of them, on my display screens. If I want, I can call up x-ray pictures of them, CAT scans, even. I can ask the mainframe for the blueprints of our newest missile guidance system, or for this morning's rollcall attendance at any Army base in

the world. No need for that, though. Not now. Not today. Too much work to do.

I give him a few minutes to get the feel of the big leather chair behind that desk, and let the other four settle down in their seats. Treasury takes the old Kennedy rocker; I knew he would.

Then I reach out, like God on the Sistine ceiling, and lay my extended finger on the first pressure pad of the master keyboard.

The morning Situation Report springs up on my central screen. And on the screen atop Our Man's desk. Not too tough a morning, I see. He's always been lucky.

Food riots in Poland are in their third day.

The civil war in the Philippines has re-ignited; Manila is in flames, with at least three different factions fighting to take command of the city.

Terrorists assassinated the president of Mexico during the night.

The stock market will open the day at the lowest point the Dow Jones has seen in fourteen years.

Unemployment is approaching the twenty percent mark, although this is no reflection on Our Man's economic policy (my program, really) because we haven't had time to put it into effect.

The dollar is still sinking in the European markets. Trading in Tokyo remains suspended.

Intelligence reports that the new Russian base on the Moon is strictly a military base, contrary to the treaties that both we and they signed back in the Sixties.

All in all, the kind of morning that any American president might have faced at any time during the past several Administrations.

"This Mexican assassination is a jolt," says the secretary of Commerce. He's a chubby, round-cheeked former computer whiz, a multi-multi-millionaire when he was in his twenties, a philanthropist in his thirties, and for this decade a selfless public servant. If you can believe that. He hired me, originally, and got me this position as Our Man's programmer. Still thinks he's up to-date on computers. Actually, he's twenty years behind but nobody's got the guts to tell him. His beard is still thick and dark, but when I punch in a closeup on my screens I can see a few gray hairs. In another couple of years he's going to look like a neurotic Santa Claus.

Our Man nods, pouting a little, as if the assassination of a president anywhere is a low blow and a personal affront to him.

"The situation in the Philippines is more dangerous," says the Defense secretary. "If the Reds win there they'll have Japan outflanked and Australia threatened."

I like his Defense secretary. He is a careful old grayhair who smokes

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a pipe, dresses conservatively, and has absolute faith in whatever his computer displays tell him. He has the reputation for being one of the sharpest thinkers in Washington. Actually, it's his programmers who are sharp. All he does is read what they print out for him, between puffs on his pipe.

"Maybe we should get the National Security Advisor in on this," suggests Commerce, scratching at his beard.

"By all means," says Our Man.

We can't have the Security Advisor in the room, of course, but I call him up on the communications screen and Presto! there he is, looking as baggy and sad-eyed as a hound.

"What do you make of the situation in the Philippines, Doc?" Our Man, with his warmth and wit, and power, is the only man on Earth who can get away with calling this distinguished, dour, pompously pontifical scholar *Doc*.

"Mr. President," his voice sounds like the creaking of a heavy, ancient castle door, "it is just as I have outlined for you on many occasions in the past. The situation in the Philippines can no longer be ignored. The strategic value of this traditional ally of ours is vital to our interests throughout Asia and the Pacific."

As he gives his perfectly predictable little spiel, I call up the subroutine that presents the pertinent information about the Philippines: the screens throw up data on our military and naval bases there, the ocean trade routes that they affect, the number of American business firms that have factories in the Philippines and how losing those factories would affect the GNP, employment, the value of the dollar—that kind of stuff.

I put all this information on the secondary screens that line the wall to one side of the president's desk. His eyes ping-pong between them and the desktop display of the security advisor.

"Thanks, Doc," he says at last. "I appreciate your candor. Please stand by, in case I need more input from you."

He turns back to the little group by his desk. I freeze Doc's image and fling it electronically to my farthest upper-right screen, a holding spot for him.

"Much as I hate to say it," Defense mutters around his pipe, "we're going to have to make our presence felt in the Philippines."

"You mean militarily," says the vice president, her nose wrinkling with distaste. She has been an excellent vote-getter all through her political career: a Mexican-American from San Antonio who looks sexy enough to start rumors about her and Our Man.

"Of course militarily," Defense replies, with ill-concealed impatience.

"Look at the data on the screens. We can't let the Philippines slip away from us."

"Why does it always have to be troops and guns?" the Veep grumbles.

"I was thinking more of ships and planes."

"A task force," says the man behind the big desk. "A carrier group. That can be pretty impressive."

While they discuss the merits of a carrier group versus one of the old resurrected battleships, and whether or not they should throw in a battalion of Marines just in case, I do a little anticipating and flick my fingers in a way that brings up the projected costs for such a mission and how it will affect DoD's budget.

And, just as surely as gold is more precious than silver, the secretary of the Treasury bestirs himself.

"Hey, wait a minute. This is going to cost real heavy money."

He has a very practical attitude toward money: his, mine, or yours. He wants all of it for himself. The only black in Our Man's cabinet, Treasury is a hardheaded pragmatist who took the paltry few million his father left him (from a restaurant chain) and parlayed them into billions on the stock market. For years he belonged to the Other Party, but when the last president failed to name him to his cabinet, he switched allegiance and devoted his life, his fortune, and what was left of his honor to Our Man.

Now he calls for details on the cost projections and, thanks to the wizardry of binary electronics, I place before their eyes (on the wall screens) vividly colored graphs which show not only how much the carrier group's mission will cost, but my program's projections of what the Philippine rebels' likely responses will be. These include—but are not limited to—a wave of assassinations throughout the 7100 islands and islets of the archipelago, a *coup d'etat* by their army, terrorist suicide attacks on our aircraft carrier, and armed intervention by the People's Republic of China.

Our Man is fascinated by these possibilities. The more awful they are, the more intrigued he is.

"Let's play these out and see where they lead," he says. He doesn't realize that he's speaking to me. He's just making a wish, like the prince in a fairytale, and I, his digital godfather, must make the wish come true.

For two hours we play out the various scenarios, using my programs and the White House mainframe's stored memory banks to show where each move leads, what each countermove elicits. It is like following a grand master chess tournament on your home computer. Some of the scenarios lead to a nuclear engagement. One of them leads to a full-scale

nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union: Armageddon, followed by nuclear winter.

Our Man, naturally, picks out the scenario that comes up best for our side.

"Okay then," he says, looking exhilarated. He's always enjoyed playing computer games. "We will forego the naval task force and merely increase our garrisons at Subic Bay and Mindanao. Our best counter to the threat, apparently, is to withhold economic aid from the Philippine government until they open honest negotiations with their opposition."

"If you can believe the computer projections," grumbles Commerce. He doesn't trust any programs he can't understand, and he's so far out of date that he can't understand my program. So he doesn't trust me.

The vice president seems happy enough with me. "We can form a Cease Fire Commission, made up of members from the neighboring nations."

"It'll never work," mutters Commerce from behind his beard.

"The computer says it will," Defense points out. He doesn't look terribly happy about it, though.

"What I want to know," says Treasury, "is what this course of action is going to do to our employment problems."

And it goes on like that for the rest of the day. Every problem they face is linked with all the other problems. Every Marine sent overseas has an effect on employment. Every unemployed teenager in the land has an effect on the crime rate. Every unwed mother has an effect on the price of milk.

No human being, no cabinet full of human beings, can grasp all these interlinks without the aid of a *very* sophisticated computer program. Let them sit there and debate, let Our Man make his speeches to the public. The real work is done by the machine, by my program, by the software that can encompass all the data in the world and display it in all its interconnected complexity. They think they're making decisions, charting the course for the nation to follow, leading the people. In reality, the decisions they make are the decisions that the computer allows them to make, based on the information presented to them. It's my program that's charting the course for the nation; those human beings sitting around the president's desk are puppets, nothing more.

And don't think that I consider myself to be the puppet master, pulling their strings. Far from it. I'm just the guy who wrote the computer program. It's the program that runs the show. The program, as alive as any creature of flesh and blood, an electronic person that feeds on data, a digital soul that aspires to know everything, everywhere. Even during this one day it has grown and matured, I can see it happening before my teary eyes. Like a proud father I watch my program learning from the White House's giant mainframe, becoming more sure of itself, reaching

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out questioning tendrils all across the world and learning, learning, learning.

"Four o'clock," announces the studio director. "Time to wrap it up."

The overhead lights turn off as abruptly as the end of the world. Our Man flinches, looks up, his face showing vast disappointment, irritation, even anger. The others exhale sighingly, wipe their brows, get up from their chairs and stretch their weary bones. It's been a long day.

The TV camera crews shuffle out of the studio as the director, earphone still clamped to his head, comes over to Our Man and sticks out his hand.

"You did an excellent job, sir. You've got my vote in November."

Our Man gives him the old dazzling smile. "Thanks. I'll need every vote I can get, I'm sure. And don't forget the primary!"

"April 7," the studio director smiles back. "Don't worry, I'll vote for you."

He must tell that to all the candidates.

I remain at my post, hidden behind the computer consoles, and check the National Rating Service's computer to see how well Our Man *really* did. The screen shows a rating of 0.54. Not bad. In fact, the best rating for any candidate who's been tested so far. It will look really impressive in the media; should get a lot of votes for Our Man.

He still has to go through the primaries, of course, but that's done mainly by electronics. No more backbreaking campaigns through every state for month after month. The candidates appeal to the voters individually, through their TV screens and home computers, a personal message to each bloc of voters, tailored to each bloc's innermost desires, thanks to the polished techniques of psychological polling and videotaping.

But this test run in the simulated oval office is of crucial importance. Each candidate has got to show that he can handle the pressures of an average day in the White House, that he can make decisions that will be good, effective, and politically palatable. Excerpts from today's simulation test will be on the evening news; tomorrow's papers will carry the story on page one. And naturally, the entire day's test will be available on PBS and even videotape for any voter who wants to see the whole day.

Of course, what this day's simulation *really* tested was my program. I feel a little like Cyrano de Bergerac, ghost-writing letters to the woman he loves for another man to woo her.

Making sure that no one is watching, I tap out the code for the White House mainframe's most secret subroutine. Only a handful of programmers know about this part of the White House's machine. None of our candidates know of it.

In the arcane language that only we dedicated programmers know, I

ask the mainframe how well my program did. The answer glows brilliantly on the central screen: 0.96. Ninety-six! The highest score any program has ever received.

I hug myself and double over to keep from laughing out loud. If my legs worked I would jump up and dance around the studio. Ninety-six! The best ever!

No matter which candidate gets elected, no matter who votes for whom, the White House mainframe is going to pick *my* program. My program will be the one the next President uses for the coming four years. Mine!

With my heart thumping wildly in my chest, I shut down the consoles. All the screens go dark. I spin my chair around and go wheeling through the emptied, darkened studio, heading for the slice of light offered by the half-open door. Already my mind is churning with ideas for improving the program.

After all, in another four years, the primaries start all over again. ●

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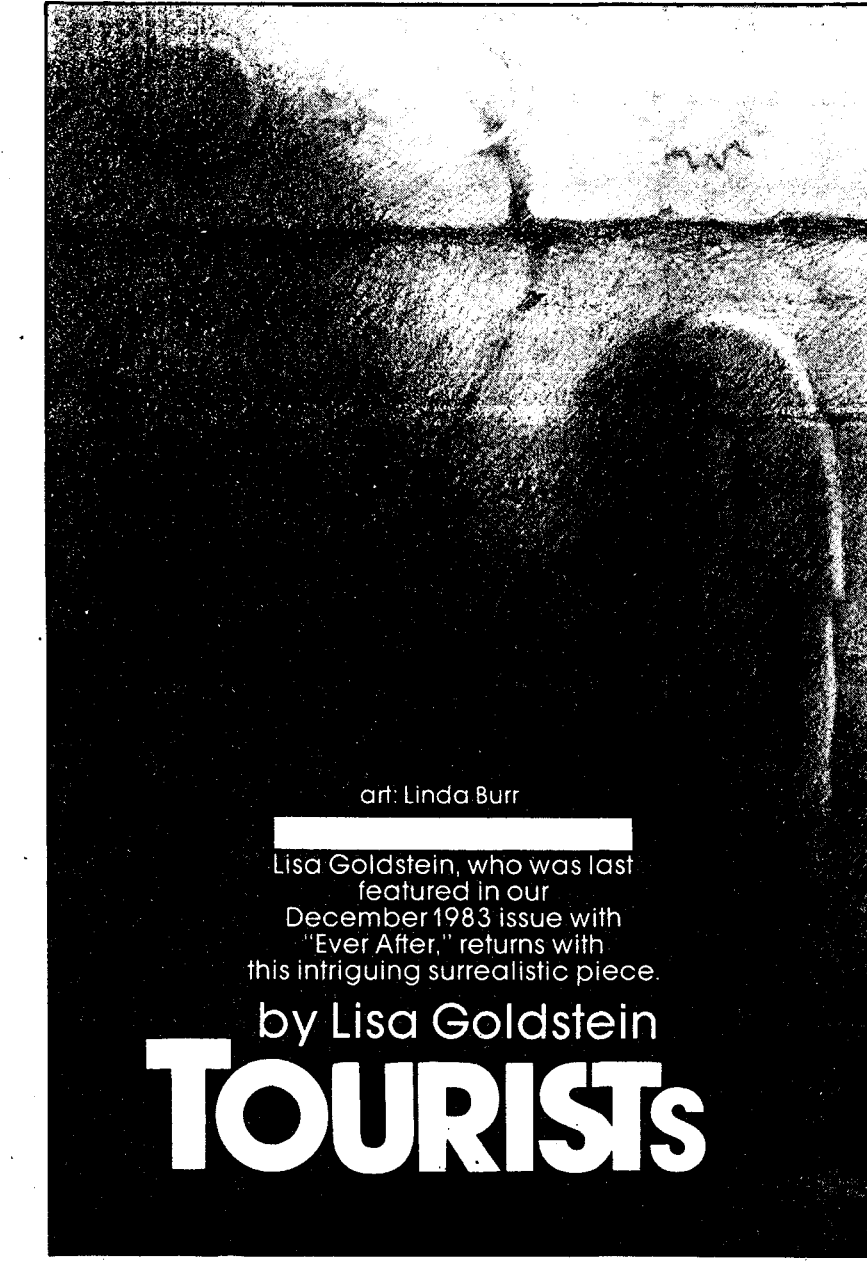
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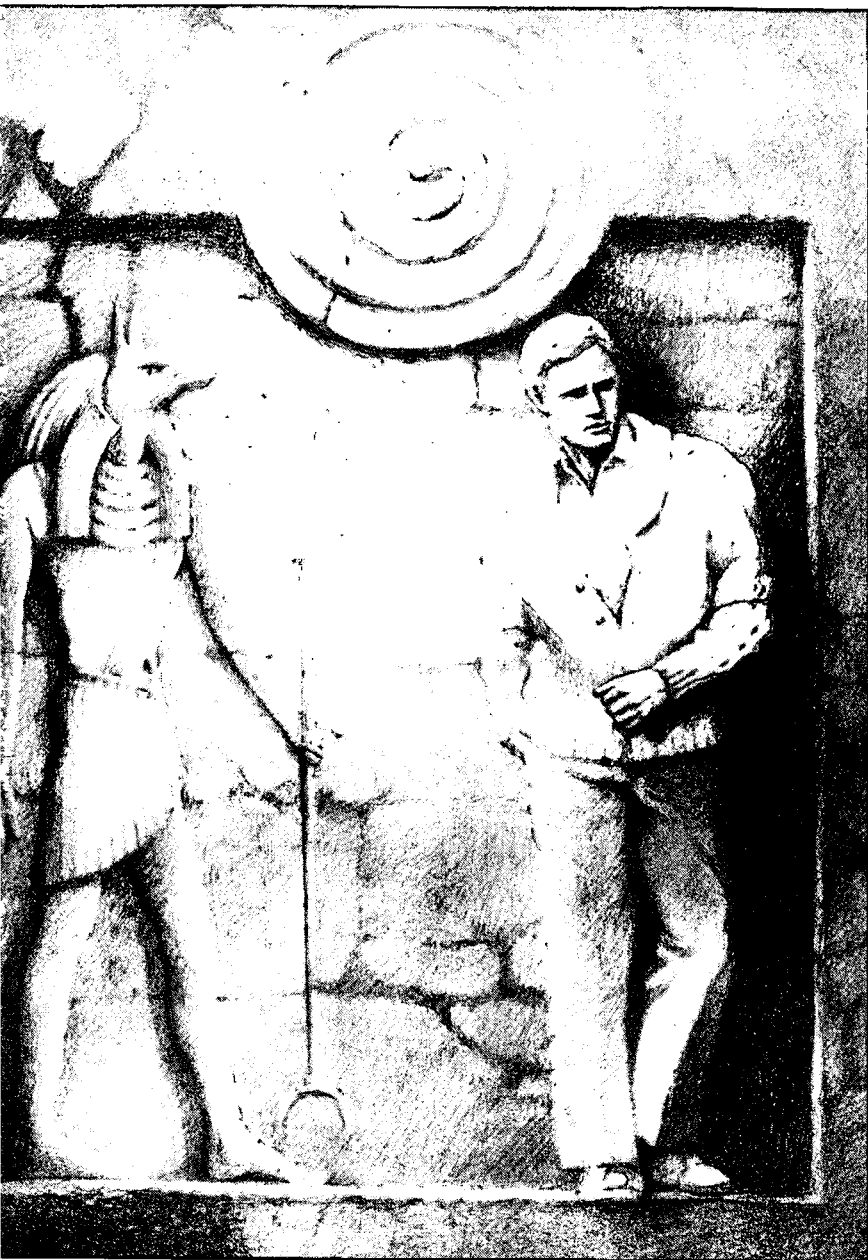
KATHY TULLY-CESTARO
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR, SUBSCRIPTIONS



art: Linda Burr

Lisa Goldstein, who was last
featured in our
December 1983 issue with
"Ever After," returns with
this intriguing surrealistic piece.

by Lisa Goldstein
TOURISTS



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He awoke feeling cold. He had kicked the blankets off and the air conditioning was on too high. Debbie—where was she? It was still dark out.

Confused, he pulled the blankets back and tried to go to sleep. Something was wrong. Debbie was gone, probably in the bathroom or downstairs getting a cup of coffee. And he was . . . he was on vacation, but where? Fully awake now, he sat up and tried to laugh. It was ridiculous. Imagine paying thousands of dollars for a vacation and then forgetting where you were. Greece? No, Greece was last year.

He got up and opened the curtains. The ocean ten stories below was black as sleep, paling a little to the east—it had to be east—where the sun was coming up. He turned down the air conditioning—the soft hum stopped abruptly—and headed for the bathroom. “Debbie?” he said, tentatively. He was a little annoyed. “Debbie?”

She was still missing after he had showered and shaved and dressed. “All right then,” he said aloud, mostly to hear the sound of his voice. “If you’re not coming, I’ll go to breakfast without you.” She was probably out somewhere talking to the natives, laughing when she got a word wrong, though she had told him before they left that she had never studied a foreign language. She was good at languages, then—some people were. He remembered her saying in her soft Southern accent, “For goodness sake, Charles, why do you think people will understand you if you just talk to them louder? These people just don’t speak English.” And then she had taken over, pointing and laughing and looking through a phrase book she had gotten somewhere. And they would get the best room, the choicest steak, the blanket the craftswoman had woven for her own family. Charles’ stock rose when he was with her, and he knew it. He hoped she would show up soon.

Soft Muzak played in the corridor and followed him into the elevator as he went down to the coffee shop. He liked the coffee shop in the hotel, liked the fact that the waiters spoke English and knew what an omelet was. The past few days he had been keeping to the hotel more and more, lying out by the beach and finally just sitting by the hotel pool drinking margaritas. The people back at the office would judge the success of the vacation by what kind of tan he got. Debbie had fretted a little and then had told him she was taking the bus in to see the ruins. She had come back darker than he was, the blond hairs on her arm bleached almost white against her brown skin, full of stories about women on the bus carrying chickens and temples crumbling in the desert. She was wearing a silver bracelet inlaid with blue and green stones.

When he paid the check he realized that he still didn’t know what country he was in. The first bill he took out of his wallet had a five on each corner and a picture of some kind of spiky flower. The ten had a

view of the ocean and the one, somewhat disturbingly, showed a fat coiled snake. There was what looked like an official seal on the back of all of them, but no writing. Illiterates, he thought. But he would remember soon enough, or Debbie would come back.

Back in his room, changing into his swim trunks, he thought of his passport. Feeling like a detective who has just cracked the case he got out his money belt out from under the mattress and unzipped it. His passport wasn't there. His passport and his plane ticket back. The traveler's checks were still there, but useless to him without the passport as identification. Cold washed over him. He sat on the bed, his heart pounding.

Think, he told himself. They're somewhere else. They've got to be—who would steal the passport and not the traveler's checks? Unless someone needed the passport to leave the country. But who knew where he had hidden it? No one but Debbie, who had laughed at him for his precautions, and the idea of Debbie stealing the passport was absurd. But where was she?

All right, he thought. I've got to find the American consulate, work something out. . . . Luckily I just cashed a traveler's check yesterday. I've been robbed, and Americans get robbed all the time. It's no big thing. I have time. I'm paid up at the hotel till—till when?

Annoyed, he realized he had forgotten that too. For the first time he wondered if there might be something wrong with him. Overwork, maybe. He would have to see someone about it when he got back to the States.

He lifted the receiver and called downstairs. "Yes, sor?" the man at the desk said.

"This is Room 1012," Charles said. "I've forgotten—I was calling to check—How long is my reservation here?"

There was a silence at the other end, a disapproving silence, Charles felt. Most of the guests had better manners than to forget the length of their stay. He wondered what the man's reaction would be if he had asked what country he was in and felt something like hysteria rise within him. He fought it down.

The man when he came back was carefully neutral. "You are booked through tonight, sor," he said. "Do you wish to extend your stay?"

"Uh—no," Charles said. "Could you tell me—Where is the American consulate?"

"We have no relations with your country, sor," the man at the desk said.

For a moment Charles did not understand what he meant. Then he asked, "Well, what about—the British consulate?"

The man at the desk laughed and said nothing. Apparently he felt no

need to clarify. As Charles tried to think of another question—Australian consulate? Canadian?—the man hung up.

Charles stood up carefully. "All right," he said to the empty room. "First things first." He got his two suitcases out of the closet and went through them methodically. Debbie's carrying case was still there and he went through that too. He checked under both mattresses, in the nightstand, in the medicine cabinet in the bathroom. Nothing. All right then. Debbie had stolen it, had to have. But why? And why didn't she take her carrying case with her when she went?

He wondered if she would show up back at the office. She had worked down the hall from him, one of the partner's secretaries. He had asked her along for companionship, making it clear that there were no strings attached, that he was simply interested in not traveling alone. Sometimes this kind of relationship turned sexual and sometimes it didn't. Last year, with Katya from accounting, it had. This year it hadn't.

There was still nothing to worry about, Charles thought, snapping the locks on the suitcases. Things like this probably happened all the time. He would get to the airport, where they would no doubt have records, a listing of his flight, and he would explain everything to them there. He checked his wallet for credit cards and found that they were still there. Good, he thought. Now we get to see if the advertisements are true. Accepted all over the world.

He felt so confident that he decided to stay the extra day at the hotel. After all, he thought, I've paid for it. And maybe Debbie will come back. He threw his towel over his shoulder and went downstairs.

The usual people were sitting out by the pool. Millie and Jean, the older women from Miami. The two newlyweds who had kept pretty much to themselves. The hitchhiker who was just passing through and who had been so entertaining that no one had had the heart to report him to the hotel management. Charles nodded to them and ordered his margarita from the bar before sitting down.

Talk flowed around him. "Have you been to Djuzban yet?" Jean was saying to the retired couple who had just joined them at the pool. "We took the hotel tour yesterday. The marketplace is just fabulous. I bought this ring there—see it?" And she flashed silver and stones.

"I hear the ruins are pretty good out in Djuzban," the retired man said.

"Oh, Harold," his wife said. "Harold wants to climb every tower in the country."

"No, man, for ruins you gotta go to Zabla," the hitchhiker said. "But the buses don't go there—you gotta rent a car. It's way the hell out in the desert, unspoiled, untouched. If your car breaks down you're dead—ain't nobody passing through that way for days."

Harold's wife shuddered in the heat. "I just want to do some shopping

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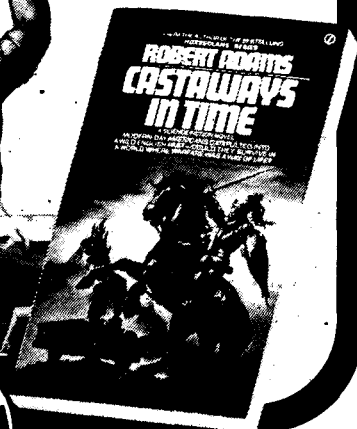
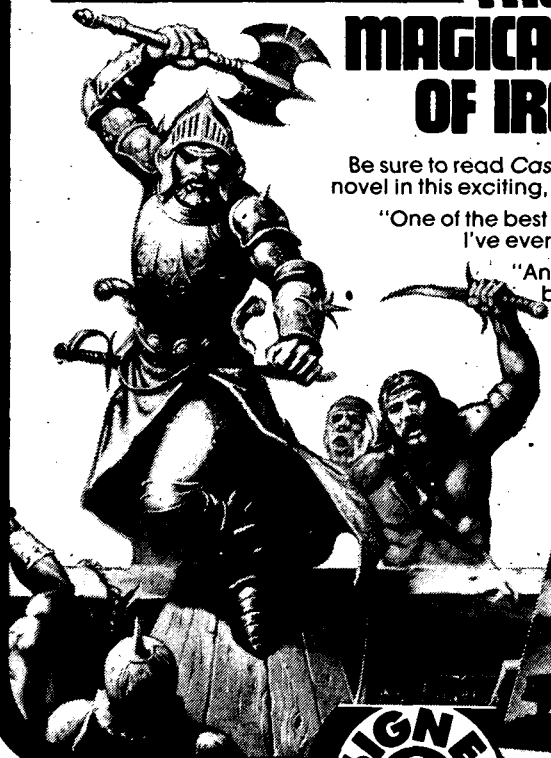
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before we go home," she said. "I heard you can pick up bargains in leather in Qarnatl."

"All we saw in Qarnatl were natives trying to sell us decks of cards," Jean said. She turned to Millie. "Remember? I don't know why they thought Americans would be interested in their playing cards. They weren't even the same as ours."

Charles sipped his margarita, listening to the exotic names flow around him. What if he told them the names meant nothing to him, nothing at all? But he was too embarrassed. There were appearances to keep up after all, the appearance of being a seasoned traveler, of knowing the ropes. He would find out soon enough, anyway.

The day wore on. Charles had a margarita, then another. When the group around the pool broke up it seemed the most natural thing in the world to follow them into the hotel restaurant and order a steak, medium-rare. He was running low on cash, he noticed—he'd have to cash another traveler's check in the morning.

But in the morning when he awoke, cold sober, he knew immediately what he'd done. He reached for his wallet on the nightstand, fingers trembling a little. There was only a five with its bleak little picture of a shrub left. Well, he thought, feeling a little shaky. Maybe someone's going to the airport today. Probably. The guys in the office aren't going to believe this one.

He packed up his two suitcases, leaving Debbie's overnight bag for her in case she came back. Downstairs he headed automatically for the coffee shop before he remembered. Abruptly he felt his hunger grow worse. "Excuse me," he said to the man at the desk. "How much—do you know how much the taxi to the airport is?"

"No speak English, sor," the man said. He was small and dark, like most of the natives. His teeth were stained red.

"You don't—" Charles said, disgusted. "Why in God's name would they hire someone who doesn't speak English? How much," he said slowly. "Taxi. Airport." He heard his voice grow louder; apparently Debbie was right.

The man shrugged. Another man joined them. Charles turned on him with relief. "How much is the taxi to the airport?"

"Oh, taxi," the man said, as though the matter were not very important. "Not so much, sor. Eight, nine. Maybe fifteen."

"Fifteen?" Charles said. He tried to remember the airport, remember how he'd gotten here. "Not five?" He held up five fingers.

The second man laughed. "Oh no, sor," he said. "Fifteen. Twenty." He shrugged.

Charles looked around in desperation. Hotel Tours, said the sign behind the front desk. Ruins. Free. "The ruins," he said, pointing to the

sign, wondering if either of the men could read. "Are they near the airport?" He could go to the ruins, maybe get a ride. . . .

"Near?" the second man said. He shrugged again. "Maybe. Yes, I think so."

"How near?" Charles said.

"Near," the second man said. "Yes. Near enough."

Charles picked up the two suitcases and followed the line of tourists to the bus stop. See, he thought. Nothing to worry about, and you're even getting a free ride to the airport. Those taxi drivers are thieves anyway.

It was awkward maneuvering the suitcases up the stairs of the bus. "I'm going on to the airport," Charles said to the driver, feeling the need to explain.

"Of course, sor," the driver said, shrugging as if to say that an American's suitcases were no business of his. He added a word that Charles didn't catch. Perhaps it was in his native language.

The bus set off down the new two-lane highway fronting the hotels. Soon they left the hotels behind, passed a cluster of run-down shacks, and were heading into the desert. The air conditioning hummed loudly. Waves of heat traveled across the sands.

After nearly an hour the bus stopped. "We have one hour," the driver said in bad English. He opened the door. "These are the temple of Marmaz. Very old. One hour." The tourists filed out. A few were adjusting cameras or pointing lenses.

Because of the suitcases Charles was the last out. He squinted against the sun. The temple was a solid wall of white marble against the sand. Curious in spite of himself he crossed the parking lot, avoiding the native who was trying to show him something. "Pure silver," the small man said, calling after him. "Special price just for you."

In front of the temple was a cracked marble pool, now dry. Who were these people who had carried water into the desert, who had imprisoned the moon in pale marble? But then how much had he known about the other tourist spots he had visited, the Greeks who had built the Parthenon, the Mayans who had built the pyramids? He followed the line of tourists into the temple, feeling the coolness fall over him like a blessing.

He went from room to room, delighted, barely feeling the weight of the suitcases. He saw crumbling mosaics of reds and blues and greens, fragments of tapestries, domes, fountains, towers, a white dining hall that could seat a hundred. In one small room a native was explaining a piece of marble sculpture to a dozen Americans.

"This, he is the god of the sun," the native said. "And in the next room, the goddess of the moon. Moon, yes? We will go see her after. Once a

year, at the end of the year, the two statues—statues, yes?—go outside. The priests take outside. They get married. Her baby is the new year.”

“What nonsense,” a woman standing near Charles said quietly. She was holding a guidebook. “That’s the fourth king. He built the temple. God of the sun.” She laughed scornfully.

“Can I—can I see that book for a minute?” Charles said. The cover had flipped forward tantalizingly, almost revealing the name of the country.

The woman looked briefly at her watch. “Got to go,” she said. “The bus is leaving in a minute and I’ve got to find my husband. Sorry.”

Charles’ bus was gone by the time he left the temple. It was much cooler now but heat still rose from the desert sands. He was very hungry, nearly tempted to buy a cool drink and a sandwich at the refreshment stand near the parking lot. “Cards?” someone said to him.

Charles turned. The small native said something that sounded like “Tirazi!” It was the same word the bus driver had said to him in the morning. Then, “Cards?” he said again.

“What?” Charles said impatiently, looking for a taxi.

“Ancient playing set,” the native said. “Very holy.” He took out a deck of playing cards from an embroidered bag and spread them for Charles. The colors were very bright. “Souvenir,” the native said. He grinned, showing red-stained teeth. “Souvenir of your trip.”

“No, thank you,” Charles said. All around the parking lot, it seemed, little natives were trying to sell tourists rings and pipes and blouses and, for some reason, packs of playing cards. “Taxi?” he said. “Is there a taxi here?”

The native shrugged and moved on to the next tourist.

It was getting late. Charles went towards the nearest tour bus. The driver was leaning against the bus, smoking a small cigarette wrapped in a brown leaf. “Where can I find a taxi?” Charles asked him.

“No taxis,” the driver said.

“No—why not?” Charles said. This country was impossible. He couldn’t wait to get out, to be on a plane drinking a margarita and heading back to the good old U.S.A. This was the worst vacation he’d ever had. “Can I make a phone call? I have to get to the airport.”

A woman about to get on the bus heard him and stopped. “The airport?” she said. “The airport’s fifty miles from here. At least. You’ll never find a taxi to take you that far.”

“Fifty miles?” Charles said. “They told me—At the hotel they told me it was fairly close.” For a moment his confidence left him. What do I do now? he thought. He sagged against the suitcases.

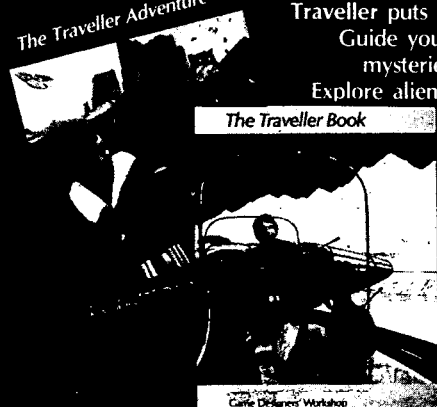
“Listen,” the woman said. She turned to the bus driver. “We’ve got room. Can’t we take him back to the city with us? I think we’re the last bus to leave.”

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The driver shrugged. "For the tiraz, of course. Anything is possible."

If Charles hadn't been so relieved at the ride he would have been annoyed. What did this word tiraz mean? Imbecile? Man with two suitcases? He followed the woman onto the bus.

"I can't believe you thought this was close to the airport," the woman said. He sat across the aisle from her. "This is way out in the desert. There's nothing here. No one would come out here if it wasn't for the ruins."

"They told me at the hotel," Charles said. He didn't really want to discuss it. He was no longer the seasoned traveler, the man who had regaled the people around the pool with stories of Mexico, Greece, Hawaii. He would have to confess, have to go back to the hotel and tell someone the whole story. Maybe they would bring in the police to find Debbie. A day wasted and he had only gone around in a circle, back to where he started. He felt tired and very hungry.

But when the bus stopped it was not at the brightly-lit row of hotels. He strained to see in the oncoming dusk. "I thought you said—" He turned to the woman, hating to sound foolish again. "I thought we were going to the city."

"This is—" the woman said. Then she nodded in understanding. "You want the new city, the tourist city. That's up the road about ten miles. Any cab'll take you there."

Charles was the last off the bus again, slowed this time not so much by the suitcases as by the new idea. People actually stayed in the same cities where the natives lived. He had heard of it being done but he had thought only young people did it, students and drifters and hitchhikers like the one back at the hotel. This woman was not young and she had been fairly pleasant. He wished he had remembered to thank her.

The first cab driver laughed when Charles showed him the five note and asked to be taken to the new city. The driver was not impressed by the traveler's checks. The second and third drivers turned him down flat. The city smelled of motor oil and rancid fish. It was getting late, even a little chilly, and Charles began to feel nervous about being out so late. The two suitcases were an obvious target for some thief. And where would he go? What would he do?

The panic that he had suppressed for so long took over now and he began to run. He dove deeper into the twisting maze of the city, not caring where he went so long as he was moving. Everything was closed and there were few streetlamps. He heard the sounds of his footfalls echo off the shuttered buildings. A cat jumped out of his way, eyes flashing gold.

After a long time of running he began to slow. "Tiraz!" someone whispered to him from an abandoned building. His heart pounded. He did

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not look back. Ahead was a lit storefront, a store filled with clutter. The door was open. A pawn shop.

He went in with relief. He cleared a space for himself among the old magazines and rusty baking pans and child's beads. The man behind the counter watched but made no comment. He took out everything from the two suitcases, sorted out what he needed and repacked it and gave the other suitcase to the man behind the counter. The man went to a small desk, unlocked a drawer and took out a steel box. He counted out some money and offered it to Charles. Charles accepted it wordlessly, not even bothering to count it.

The money bought a meal tasting of sawdust and sesame oil and a sagging bed in an old hotel. The overhead fan turned all night because Charles could not figure out how to turn it off. A cockroach watched impassively from the corner.

The city looked different in daylight. Women in shawls and silver bracelets, men in clothes fashionable fifty years ago, walked past the hotel as Charles looked out in the morning. The sun was shining. His heart rose. This was going to be the day he made it to the airport.

He walked along the streets almost jauntily, ignoring the ache in his arms. His beard itched because last night, in a moment of panic, he had thrown his electric razor into the suitcase to be sold. He shrugged. There were still things he could sell. Today he would find a better pawn shop.

He walked, passing run-down houses and outdoor markets, beggars and children, automobile garages and dim restaurants smelling of frying fish. "Excuse me," he said to a man leaning against a horse-drawn carriage. "Do you know where I can find a pawn shop?"

The man and horse both looked up. "Ride, yes?" the man said enthusiastically.

siastically. "Famous monuments. Very cheap."

"No," Charles said. "A pawn shop. Do you understand?"

The man shrugged, pulled the horse's mane. "No speak English," he said finally.

Another man had come up behind Charles. "Pawn shop?" he said.

Charles turned quickly, relieved. "Yes," he said. "Do you know—"

"Two blocks down," the man said. "Turn left, go five blocks. Across the hospital."

"What street is that?" Charles asked.

"Street?" the man said. He frowned. "Two blocks down and turn left."

"The name," Charles said. "The name of the street."

To Charles' astonishment the man burst out laughing. The carriage-driver laughed too, though he could not have possibly known what they were talking about. "Name?" the man said. "You tourists name your streets as though they were little children, yes?" He laughed again, wiping his eyes, and said something to the carriage-driver in another language, speaking rapidly.

"Thank you," Charles said. He walked the two blocks, turned left and went five blocks more. There was no hospital where the man had said there would be, and no pawn shop. A man who spoke a little English said something about a great fire, but whether it had been last week or several years ago Charles was unable to find out.

He started back toward the man who had given him directions. In a few minutes he was hopelessly lost. The streets became dingier and once he saw a rat run from a pile of newspapers. The fire had swept through this part of the city leaving buildings charred and water-damaged, open to the passers-by like museum exhibits. Two dirty children ran towards him, shouting, "Money, please, sor! Money for food!" He turned down a side-street to lose them.

Ahead of him were three young men in grease-stained clothes. One of them hissed something at him, the words rushing by like a fork of lightning. Another held a length of chain which he played back and forth, whispering, between his hands. "I don't speak—" Charles said; but it was too late. They were on him.

One tore the suitcase from his hand, shouting "El amak! El amak!" Another knocked him down with a punch to his stomach that forced the wind out of him. The third was going through his pockets, taking his wallet and the little folder of traveler's checks. Charles tried feebly to rise and the second one thrust him back, hitting him once more in the stomach. The first one yelled something and they ran quickly down the street. Charles lay where they left him, gasping for breath.

The two dirty children passed him; and an old woman balancing a

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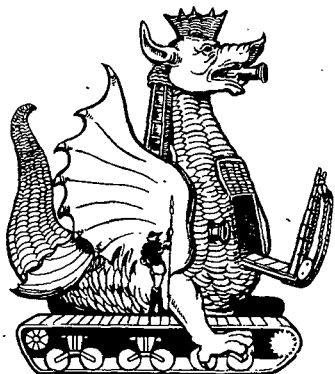


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basket of clothes on her head. After a few minutes he rolled over and sat up, leaning against a rusty car up on blocks. His pants were torn, he noticed dully, torn and smeared with oil. And his suitcase with the rest of his clothes was gone.

He would go to the police, go and tell them that his suitcase was gone. He knew the word for suitcase because the young thief had shouted it. Amak. El amak. And suddenly he understood something that knocked the breath out of him as surely as a punch to the stomach, understood that he had understood nothing since coming to this country. At the back of his mind, despite all his education, he had somehow expected every native he met to drop this ridiculous charade and start speaking like normal people. But now, learning his first word in this strange tongue, he came to a realization of language, understood in his bones that every word you could think of—hand, love, table, hot—was conveyed to these natives by another word, a word not English. He tried to laugh at his stupidity but the pain wrenched his stomach and he stopped abruptly.

After a while he stood up gingerly, breathing shallowly to make the pain go away. He began walking again, following the maze of the city in deeper. At last he found a small park and sat on a bench to rest.

A native came up to him almost immediately. "Cards?" the native said. "Look." He opened his embroidered bag.

Charles sighed. He was too tired to walk away. "I don't want any cards," he said. "I don't have any money."

"Of course not," the native said. "Look. They are beautiful, no?" He spread the brightly colored cards on the grass. Charles saw a baseball player, a fortune-teller, a student, some designs he didn't recognize. "Look," the native said again and turned over the next card. "The tourist."

Charles had to laugh, looking at the card of the man carrying suitcases. These people had been visited by tourists for so long that the tourist had become an archetype, a part of everyone's reality like kings and jokers. He looked closer at the card. Those suitcases were familiar. And the tourist . . . he jerked back as though shocked. It was him.

He stood quickly and began to run, ignoring the pain in his stomach. The native did not follow.

He noticed the card-sellers on every corner after that. They called to him even if he crossed the street to avoid them. "Tiraz, tiraz!" they called after him. He knew what it meant now. Tourist.

As the sun set he became ravenously hungry. He walked around a beggar-woman squatting in the street and saw, too late, a card-seller waiting on the corner. The card-seller held out something to him, some kind of pastry, and Charles took it, too hungry to refuse.

The pastry was filled with meat and very good. As though that were

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the signal the other card-sellers he passed began to give him things—a skin of wine, a piece of fish wrapped in paper. One of them handed him money, far more money than a deck of cards would cost. It was growing dark. He took a room for the night with the money.

A card-seller was waiting for him at the corner the next day. "All right," Charles said to him. Some of the belligerence had been knocked out of him. "I give up. What the hell's going on around here?"

"Look," the card-seller said. He took his cards out of the embroidered bag. "It is in here." He squatted on the sidewalk, oblivious to the dirt, the people walking by, the fumes from the street. The street, Charles noticed as he sat next to him, seemed to be paved with bottle-caps.

The card-seller spread the cards in front of him. "Look," he said. "It is foretold. The cards are our oracle, our newspaper, our entertainment. All depends on how you read them." Charles wondered where the man had learned to speak English but he didn't want to interrupt. "See," the man said as he turned over a card. "Here you are. The tourist. It was foretold that you would come to the city."

"And then what?" Charles asked. "How do I get back?"

"We have to ask the cards," the man said. Idly he turned over another card, the ruins of Marmaz. "Maybe we wait for the next printing."

"Next—" Charles said. "You mean the cards don't stay the same?"

"No," the man said. "Do your newspapers stay the same?"

"But—who prints them?"

The man shrugged. "We do not know." He turned over another card,

a young blonde woman.

"Debbie!" Charles said, startled.

"Yes," the man said. "The woman you came with. We had to convince her to go, so that you would fulfill the prophecy and come to the city. And then we took your pieces of paper, the ones that are so important to the tiraz. That is a stupid way to travel, if I may say so. In the city the only papers that are important to us are the cards, and if a man loses his cards he can easily get more."

"You—you took my passport?" Charles said. He did not feel as angry as he would like. "My passport and my plane tickets? Where are they?"

"Ah," the man said. "For that you must ask the cards." He took out another set of cards from his bag and gave them to Charles. Before Charles could answer he stood up and walked away.

By mid-day Charles had found the small park again. He sat down and spread out the cards, wondering if there was anything to what the card-seller had said. Debbie did not appear in his deck. Was his an earlier printing, then, or a later one?

An American couple came up to him as he sat puzzling over the cards. "There are those cards again," the woman said. "I just can't get over how quaint they are. How much are you charging for yours?" she asked Charles. "The man down the street said he'd give them to us for ten."

"Eight," Charles said without hesitation, gathering them up.

The woman looked at her husband. "All right," he said. He took a five and three ones from his wallet and gave them to Charles.

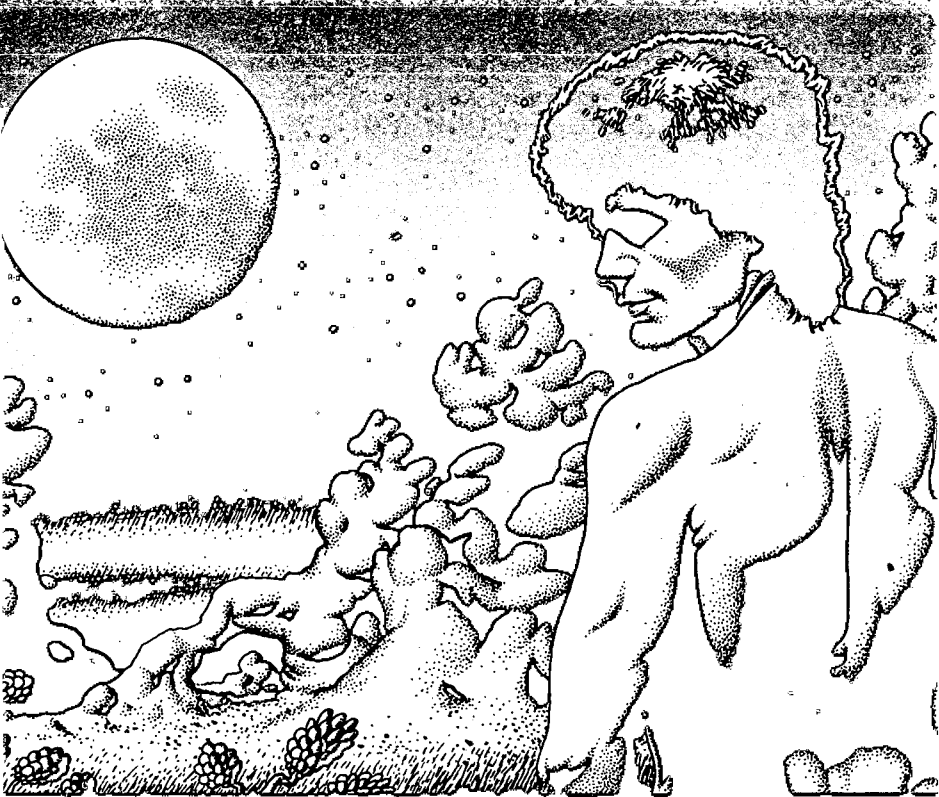
"Thank you, sor," Charles said.

The man grunted. "I thought he spoke English very well," the woman said as they walked away. "Didn't you?"

A card-seller gave him three more decks of cards and an embroidered bag later that day. By evening he had sold two of the decks. A few nights later, he joined the sellers of cards as they waited in the small park for the new printing of the cards. Somewhere a bell tolled midnight. A woman with beautiful long dark hair and an embroidered shawl came out of the night and silently took out the decks of cards from her bag. Her silver bracelets flashed in the moonlight. She gave Charles twelve decks. The men around him were already tearing the boxes open and spreading the cards, reading the past, or the present, or the future.

After about three years Charles got tired of selling the cards. His teeth had turned red from chewing the nut everyone chewed and he had learned to smoke the cigarettes wrapped in leaves.

The other men had always told him that someone who spoke English as well as he did should be a tour guide, and finally he decided that they were right. Now he takes groups of tourists through the ruins of Marmaz, telling them about the god of the sun and the goddess of the moon and whatever else he chooses to make up that day. He has never found out what country he lives in.



UNDENIABLY CUTE: A CAUTIONARY TALE

by Marta Randall

Marta Randall is the author of a number of short stories and novels, most recently *The Sword of Winter*, and past president and gunboat diplomat for the Science Fiction Writers of America. She lives in Oakland, CA, with her husband and son, both of whom are undeniably cute.

art: Robert Walters

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Someone, they decided, had used the place as a prison planet for pesky savages. Although there were no signs of the putative jailors, the prison-planet theory certainly explained the circumstances with the least possible fuss: no direct evolutionary link to the indigenous hominids, a culture (if it could be so termed) far too primitive to produce tools, and, the most telling point of all, no means of reproduction. The inhabitants, from the most wrinkled ancient to the callowest adolescent, were totally, unremittingly, irrevocably, and without exception male. And, concluded the crew of the starship *Mellora*, three years out of port on an exploratory voyage and hungry for anything to break the monotony, they were undeniably cute.

The captain, deciding on an unscheduled and deliberately unreported landing, set the *Mellora* down at the edge of a broad plain in full view of the natives, and be damned to Federation regulations. They were, after all, on a real-estate hunting expedition and not hampered by ethnologists, exobiologists, and other such unwanted cargo, all of whom came with stiff necks and total ignorance on the subject of space crews, boredom, and the unhappy combination of the two. The atmosphere was safe and fresh, the local sun shone brightly, a sweet lake glimmered nearby, and the natives, frozen with stupefaction, stood gripping their rocks and sticks and staring open-mouthed at the *Mellora's* roughened sides. The crew didn't want to wait and the captain didn't intend to make them.

Within two days the *Mellora's* crew had settled cheerfully into the native village and the natives themselves were both presentable and happy about it. Once the crew had them scrubbed down and spruced up they looked, as the ship's doctor admitted from a hammock slung in the shade, unutterably cute. And frisky. And very obliging.

The natives supplied an unending stream of fresh fruits and palatable meats and, introduced by the chief engineer to the pleasures of beer, provided endless, harmless, and athletic entertainment. The dietician and the cook together emptied the *Mellora's* holds of food and proceeded to create extravagant meals. It was, the navigator opined, Paradise. The captain, beguiled by a lithe blond native with, really, remarkable blue eyes, languidly agreed. The analyst announced comfortably that it was only logical to view the natives as pets, since it was, indeed, so nice to pet them and they, in turn, so nicely petted back. The *Mellora*, scrubbed, repaired, and entirely spaceworthy, sat locked securely in a meadow, and stayed that way.

The beginning of the end, had they but known it, came the morning the dietician announced that Prince, a young native of winsome curiosity, was learning to speak Standard. His engaging lisp and endearing linguistic mistakes were so adorable that soon everyone was teaching the

natives to speak Standard, and boasting of the progress of Runner, or Big Boy, or Button Nose, or Sweet Pea. It seemed as harmless as the original naming had seemed, and from there it was only a small step to letting Blue Boy or Cuddles or Snooks converse, and eat, at the table—they were, after all, already sleeping on the crew's beds, and had been from the first.

A fresh, new season drove the game from the verdant lake to the wide plain but no one wished to follow, least of all the once-nomadic natives. The crew, for amusement, hunted with hand-made bows and arrows and, laughing, gave in to the natives' importunities and taught them to shoot. Henceforth, Prince and Button Nose and Lucky gamboled across the plains, returning to the village burdened with their kills and so obviously, delightfully pleased with themselves that the crew hadn't the heart to tell them that the meat wasn't needed, thus fostering the gentle deception that the natives were, as they themselves believed, an integral, important, necessary part of life.

The machinist's mate took Cuddles to look at the *Mellora* and, in a fit of affectionate generosity, gifted Cuddles with the main locking mechanism, a delightful piece of mechanical complexity which Cuddles wore around his neck until he lost it hunting, but nobody minded. The rains came, washing gently through the trees and over the fresh thatch of the huts. Inside, crew and natives shared warm fireplaces and warmer beds, played mathematical games of increasing complexity, and told the long, convoluted stories at which the natives had shown such an engaging talent. Rust gathered decorously along the *Mellora*'s seams. They all got fat, and happy, and almost disgustingly cute.

Spring brought wild flowers, rainbows, warm afternoons, and one piece of news which almost terminated the idyll. The ship's doctor, returning from a damp, private, and totally enjoyable hunt with Sweet Pea, entered the captain's hut with a gift of venison, eyed the captain's comfortable little belly, prodded and poked and, eventually, sat back, looking more than a little surprised.

"You may not believe this," the doctor said in a voice fraught with disbelief itself, "but I'll stake my professional reputation on it. You're pregnant."

A spirited anatomical discussion ensued. Once convinced, the captain took action, first with the crew, who greeted the news with amusement, and then at the *Mellora*, which, without its main locking mechanism, proved to be righteously impenetrable and, true to its deep-space construction, withstood all assaults against it. Not yet discouraged, the captain returned to the village and called a meeting. The crew, for entertainment's sake, appeared.

"The *Mellora* is locked shut and unbreachable," the captain told them. "We are stranded here, and no one in the universe knows where we are."

"Good," said the master electrician. "Who wants to go back anyway? Long hours, lousy pay, and the home world's not so hot either, if you get my drift."

The crew vociferously agreed. The captain, arms folded, glared at them and waited for the noise to abate.

"We'll have to live the rest of our lives here! On a primitive planet! Amid these savages!"

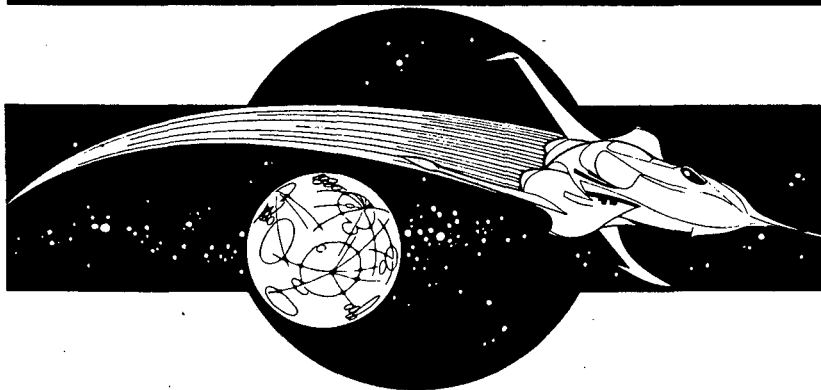
"Who are," said the analyst, blithely interrupting, "undeniably cute."

"That's not the point," the captain roared. "They may be cute, I grant you, but could you spend the rest of your life with them? We're a superior race—in evolutionary standards we're millennia ahead of them—they'll never catch up. They may think, but they don't think the way we do and they never will! We're not even the same species!"

"Close enough," the doctor said, patting the captain's comfortable little belly. "Besides, who cares? The air's clean, food's plentiful, lots of space—and they really are so damned cute."

As the captain's hands fluttered in defeat, the crew, with applause, huzzas, and ovations, and to a woman, agreed.

And that, my friends, is why we'll *never* understand them. ●



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art: Janet Aulisio

by Steven Popkes

The author, a Clarion SF Workshop graduate and a physiologist by training, says he does software in order to eat.

His first story, "A Capella Blues," was published in our June 1983 issue.

Since then, he has sold a story to *Twilight Zone* magazine, and he is currently at work on a novel.

DEATHWITCH



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For the last day or two there had been a break from the cold mountain winds and the trail of her snowshoes had been left clear. Joe Walker rested, leaning his pack and rifle against a snow-wet boulder. A long-awaited spring showed a ragged green line drawn along the foot of the mountains. Damn, he thought as he panted, I should have caught her by now. She's old. She can't keep this up much longer. It was a lie and he knew it. She'd kept him going for weeks now.

Once his skin had been red-brown and his muscles thick and strong, proper for a Mojave Indian. His color was grayish now and his muscles were stretched tight over bone. Fatigue, starvation, and sickness showed on him. It did not matter. Albuquerque was a flat crater of green glass and its ash and winds blew poison across him, making him die a slow death. That did not matter, either.

He'd find her, though, first. For Maria. For Almadeo.

That mattered.

But her trail led down into the valley, and he could see even from up here the faint smoke of fires. How many more dead would there be? He swore again, hoisted the pack and picked up the rifle. Maybe he'd be lucky. Maybe he'd find her on the way down.

Listens-to-the-River did not like the idea of ascending back into the mountains, back into Winterman's country. There were reasons, of course. There were always reasons. Since the dream, there had been few choices.

She wore a leather jacket and gloves and a misshapen pair of denims. A leather hat balanced precariously on her head and a red pair of child's sunglasses were tied tightly to her face with a bit of string. First, the white man's death had come to them, then the long, cloudy winter. Now, the sun had grown brighter. One sunburned easily, and those who did not protect their eyes eventually became blind. The cold wind blowing into her face burned her. She called out to Winterman to move aside for her. There was no answer but the wind. She cursed a white man's curse but expected no better. Only a few spirits were left to talk to her anymore.

Along the edge of the mesa the snow mounds were surrounded by stunted and twisted grasses. In the distance reared granite walls. The trail she followed eventually came to the base of those cliffs.

"I see you, Old Woman," came a voice at her side.

Listens ignored him. She muttered to herself. From here it looked as if snow were falling across the trail ahead.

"Someone is following you." The voice was low and quiet.

"I thought I left you in the valley. I tried to." She turned to him now, and as always he was barely there, barely seen, a chalk outline written on falling snow. She stood looking down towards the valley. "One of them

coming up after me? A child perhaps, for me to escort back." As she stopped to rest, the warmth in her, the fullness came to her. She felt filled, whole. It was hard to think of snow, of anything but that warmth. A slow bundling of songs grew in her. She shook her head to clear it. "Who, then, Coyote-spirit?"

Coyote seemed to cock his head at her and study her speculatively. "Are you not noble? Holy? Gathering as corn the stuff of your people—"

"Enough!" She resumed walking up the trail.

He kept pace with her effortlessly, his face half-seen, his hands in shadow. "It is a young man. Younger than you, anyway. He is walking into the valley. He talks with Leads-the-Way."

"You talk more like the white man's Devil than any Coyote I ever knew." She stopped again and looked at him. "Were you always thus? I don't remember you talking like this when I was younger."

He paused. "I was younger, too. Enough of me. You suffer. You tire. You could fall from these cliffs at any time. Carrying your burden with you, down through the air, striking the rock—"

"Enough, I said!" The trail was several feet from the edge but still she walked nervously. "Go away."

"But I haven't told you my news . . ."

"Then do so."

"You know this young man. He hunts for you as a wolf hunts a deer. As a puma stalks an elk. You know him."

Listens held herself against a sudden cold, knowing what Coyote was about to say.

"He is Three-Spirits-Walking, your son."

Joe was too tired and too sick to move. He leaned back against the rock. His body was chilled one moment, feverish the next. I can't die. I can't die yet, he raged weakly. A welcome cool wind suddenly turned biting and he shivered. Not yet, not yet.

After a time the spasms passed and he was able to sit up lethargically, waiting for a slow return of strength, knowing he had precious little.

"Are you going to die now?" came a voice just below him on the trail.

Joe started and looked down on an old man. The old man's hair had fallen out and was now beginning to grow back in a cloudy gray fuzz about his head. He wore a cracked pair of aviator sunglasses. For a long moment, Walker didn't speak.

"I don't think so," Joe said. "Joe Walker."

The old man coughed discreetly and looked away.

"Uh." Joe Walker was a white name. The old man did not want to be insulted by being given a white name from an Indian. It had been years since any but his mother had used his Indian name and having to use

it now made him angry. It gave he and Listens too much in common. "Three-Spirits-Walking."

"A strong name." He shrugged, gestured towards the mountains. "It was a long winter. Did you stay up there?"

"A little south of here."

Leads shrugged again. "When the radios quit playing music and started talking crazy we turned them off. Then, the lights went. Two men drove down to find out why. They didn't come back. Some of us were scared by the crazy talk. Others turned the radios back on. Wasn't anything at all, then. That scared us even more. We sent four more all the way to Taos, then. They didn't come back either." He stopped, looked up at Joe.

Joe realized he was being asked what happened. "I'm a trapper. Me and my brother have been trapping the Pecos for years. We went up to the cabin, my wife and child and my mother, in December. We heard the talk over the radios, too." He tried to bring it together. "The white man went crazy. He—*burned* Albuquerque. Other places too, I think. I don't know much about it. They dropped bombs, fired missiles. Just *burned* the cities down. Nothing left but ruins and green glass." He stopped for a moment. "My brother went down to see. Came back sick and died. We all got sick."

"We weren't sure. We got sick, too." Leads watched him a long time. "What happened then? Your family?"

"Dead," he lied, "took sick and died. I ran out of food and came down. I'd like to stay."

Joe waited for Leads-the-Way to make up his mind.

"You can stay here. We got some food."

Listens walked on until dark. She camped in the lee of a boulder and built a fire, chanting quietly to the four directions, asking blessings of the wind and the seasons.

"They do not hear you. They turn from you."

She looked for Coyote. He stood in the edge of the firelight, all shadows.

"One at least hears," she said. "Two, counting you."

"Yes," he nodded. "Your Buffalo-Cow-Woman dream. Was it real? Did she really speak to you?"

"It was real," she said in a low voice.

"But why? After what you humans have done—"

"The white man!" she shouted.

"You are all humans. If you had been born white, wouldn't you also have been crazy?"

She shook her head.

He seemed to shrug. "A dream. Barely remembered. The world is

poisoned, dying. You wanted to save them. So you started with killing your daughter-in-law and grandchild—”

She cried out and ran at him with a burning stick. He was gone. She wept and felt the warmth in her reach out, enfold her, care for her. Maria called her by name.

“It was real. It *is* real,” she said to Coyote though she could not see him. “She came to me and told me how it could be done. You know that. You know.”

Coyote did not answer.

The whole population of the valley was gathered in the church listening to the *hota* sing. The church was not large, but dwarfed the thirty or so survivors. They sat near one another, murmuring softly, drawing together some comfort. The *hota*’s voice cracked often and once he coughed for several minutes before he could continue.

Joe watched him sullenly. He had been fed corn and beans and felt full for the first time in months.

“I will hold your spirits until the land is cleansed. We will live then, in peace.”

She’d brought them her dream. He felt sick and angry. He leaned nearer to Leads-the-Way. “How long ago was she here?”

“She came a couple of weeks ago. Left night before last.”

Damn. Missed her, unless he’s lying.

“We only had time to hold one sing before she left. She taught Sings-in-the-Dark—” he nodded towards the *hota* “—about it though. Six went off right away. Like they’d been waiting for her.”

“Went off?”

Leads looked at him. “Died. That’s what it’s all about. They died and she took their spirits.” He looked back to the *hota*. “My wife was one of those.”

“Your wife?” Joe rose staring at Leads. The *hota* trailed off in confusion. “She killed your wife?”

“She took her.”

“She *killed* her. With her lies. With her crazy dreaming.” He looked around the room. “Listen. I left Albuquerque and lived in the mountains with my family. With my mother—this woman who murdered six of you. The bombs came and my brother died. The rest of us sickened. Then, my mother came to me. ‘I had a dream,’ she said and she told me this Buffalo-Cow-Woman nonsense.” An angry quiet entered the room. “I was in despair. My wife was sick. My child was sick. I said, ‘Try it on me, first.’ Nothing happened.” He looked at them. “*Nothing happened.* I went off to hunt. When I returned, Maria and Almado, my wife and daughter, were dead. Poisoned, maybe.”

"We are all dying," the *hota* said. "The white man has killed us. She is saving us."

"She brings you death. She has witched you." The *hota* stood and shook his fist at him. Joe ignored him. "Look, you heal. Leads-the-way's hair has begun to grow back. You all will grow strong again. She would have you dead."

"She is no witch," shouted the *hota*.

Joe watched the closed doors of their faces. "I try to help you and you will not be helped. All right. Still, she is my kin and she has murdered my family. I hunt her."

They boiled over him, pummeling him with fists and sticks used as crutches and canes. He tried to fight them but was too weak. The blows were soft and when he was stronger, they would not have hurt him. Sickly, he fought and went down. The last thing he saw was Leads-the-Way watching him speculatively.

In a dark world, she walked, lit only by mist-hidden candleflames. Each drew her, each was a life she was trying to hold. The mist was warm, comfortable and alone. Beside her, someone moved, someone she hadn't seen. Startled, she drew back. Then, she recognized him.

"I did not expect you here," she said quietly.

He turned to her, grabbed for her.

She danced away from him easily. No age or sickness encumbered her here. She chuckled softly. "An impatient child. You were always that."

He spat towards her but nothing came from him. "Witch."

She shrugged. "Maybe. It doesn't matter."

"Maria was getting better. So was Almadeo."

"Maria was dying!" she cried, stung. "Almadeo was dead already, only he still breathed. Now, I hold them. Until the world is cleansed."

"You're crazy."

She stepped back and relaxed. Laughed softly. "Maybe." Then, she was furious. "What did you care for them? Maria never knew what you wanted. Nor Almadeo. They were things to you. What affection did you have for them? What love? Even now, you follow because you hate me, not for them."

He leaped for her and melted away as she watched.

"Stubborn, too," she said sadly. "You were always that."

He awoke with the taste of bile in his mouth.

"Thirsty?" Leads-the-Way held a canteen out to him.

Joe drank noisily, washing away the taste. "What's going on?" he asked cautiously.

"I'm pointing you on your way. Bad luck to have you die here with her

being your mother. C'mon. Let's get you going." Leads stood and Joe saw his pack and rifle behind the old man. He scrambled over to them and checked them quickly.

"She's gone up there," Leads-the-Way said, ignoring him. "Across the pass. Back down towards Taos, eventually." He smiled faintly. "She's not the only one with the sight."

"Why?"

"I don't know. Spirits more powerful in the mountains, maybe? People she wants to help?" He looked at Joe. "She's stronger and smarter than you, and she's not sick. Maybe she figures she'll outlast you."

"Maybe." Joe hoisted the pack.

"If we hadn't lost the priest maybe we wouldn't have believed her." Leads-the-Way shrugged. "That would've been a shame. You're wrong about us getting better. A lot of the livestock is already blind and dying."

Joe checked his gun. "You can still plant crops."

Leads shook his head. "My nephew has a watch he got in Taos. Shows the date."

"So?"

"This is August."

"But—" Joe stopped for a moment. "This is spring."

"No." Leads-the-Way looked up towards the mountain. "It's just a little space between winters."

She had met them in the lower foothills towards Taos—no, that was wrong. She had been drawn to them, to warmth, to flame, to life. Two sisters, they had been trying to descend towards Taos, the hunger overcoming the fear that had forced them away in the first place. When she found them, they were resting in the shade of a overhang, looking down on a city they knew they were too weak to reach.

No ritual was needed this time. She told them simply of her dream and her gift and they nodded. The older sister bowed her head and asked for Listens' blessing. The other agreed. She took them easily, as a cupped hand picks up water.

She sat now next to their bodies, warm, joined with the lives she held.

"You look rested."

"Go away."

"I was always a guest of your tribe, your people. Now you cast me out?"

Listens sighed. "Coyote, I welcome you in the spirit of my ancestors."

He seemed to nod to her. "These were your latest meal?"

"I helped them," she said coldly.

"You ate them as food. Now, you rest on your meal in the warm sun."

She chuckled and sat up. "I'm a snake now, am I?"

Coyote was silent a moment. "You are amused?"

"You are different now than when I was a child. I am not at all sure you *are* Coyote."

He was silent again for a time. "I am the breath and life of my people. As they changed, so did I. I roamed through the canyons of Los Angeles. I was poisoned by sheep farmers in Wyoming. I was trapped and shot for bounty in Kansas, in Missouri. I hunted garbage cans for food in Santa Ana and Beverly Hills, in Biloxi, in Memphis. Finally, I died with them in flashes, in broken, thrown bodies, and in sickness. Should I not be different? Be bitter?" He strode towards her and became visible to her. His hair had fallen out and his hide was mangy, dirty with sickness. His legs were crippled and broken. One eye was burnt into the socket, a crusted scar, the other burned fever bright. "Old woman, savior of your people, why should I not hate you? All of you? My kind are dying once and forever. Why should I not try to prevent you from saving yours?"

He found the sisters' bodies a few days after he left the valley. Something in the peaceful way they leaned against the rock stopped him.

"She's been here," he muttered as he rested. He rested often now. He'd hunted the high country sporadically and had only been able to find moles and muskrats. In his mind, he added starvation back into the list of things he had to consider just to follow her.

Thus, when he stared down at the cold sisters, he felt only a dull acknowledgement she had come this way.

Down he came into Taos. Floods had left a ruddy clay in the streets. This had dried into hard adobe. He lost her trail and skittered aimlessly through the town like a tumbleweed.

In the plaza he found a small collection of bodies and a dark man staring morosely into a campfire.

"I'm looking for an old woman." Joe hefted the rifle.

"You missed her," the man said sullenly. He looked away from the rifle uncaring.

"Which—"

"I was the one that went to Albuquerque. I'm the one's got burnt. Jose and Havek—all of them were all too weak, but me. Ready to die. I got scared. I said, 'Maybe everything down there's all right now. Maybe the city's okay. We could get food even.' They said go, and I did. And there was a little and I brought it back. We ate it but it didn't do no good." He kicked the ground petulantly. "We just got sicker. Then, *she* come. Said she would keep us. Take care of us. I was scared again. They was too sick to be scared."

"Yeah, but—"

He stood up and grabbed Joe's jacket. "You think I got a chance? I

know I don't. Not without her. What the hell is left for me now?" He fell back and held his head in his hands. "Gonna wait. Gonna get brave."

Joe leaned over to him. "Where's she gone?"

"It don't matter," he said more to himself than Joe. "She said she can find me anywhere." The man looked up at Joe with a smile. "Even Albuquerque."

The gray world was no longer gray to her. The flames she sought as people no longer shone against a backdrop of mist, but were backlit by the glow within mountains, from trees, from the earth. She grew unconscious of the passage of time. Only searching and gathering those flames mattered. Always, she looked first for the most dim, the guttering light, the dying.

"He still follows you. He still thirsts for you." Coyote stumbled and coughed.

"Protect your own people. Leave me to mine." The flames were almost all a part of her already. Sometimes, she felt she could gather them now with a sweep of her hand.

"My people are beyond my protection." He laughed slightly. "A small band wandered into the Oklahoma City crater a few days ago. The last one just died."

"You have so little of my tribe left in you."

"Who has hunted me all these years? Indians? Not many. Just your son and a few like him. It's been the white man. Being the hunted, one learns about the hunter, becomes like him. As you do."

She turned to him. "What do you mean?"

"Your son."

Listens cast for him but could not find him. "What about my son?"

Coyote smiled with one side of his face. The other was slack with paralysis. "He hunts you. As you flee him, you become more like he wants you to be. Powerful. Deadly. A witch."

"I do not flee him. I search."

"But you do become more the witch. A Deathwitch."

South of her she could feel the dying. It drew her back into the mountains. "I am what I must be. I do what I must do. The world's dying has made me into what I am."

Coyote coughed again and shook his head. "The world would not be so cruel to me."

Again into the mountains, then through the foothills around the desert. He struggled to catch up to her. Once she reached the Albuquerque crater, it'd be much worse. She might be crazy enough to make it through, but he'd probably die before he got to her.

The trail became more fresh. He found a cabin on the mesa, a family. All with the same peaceful relaxation of their bodies he had come to associate with her. This seemed to slow her down and he began to catch up.

He was high in the Sandias now and she was not more than a few hours ahead of him. As he came over the ridge and looked down on the remains of Albuquerque he thought he saw movement on the ridge below. He lay down on the edge of the cliff and watched for a long time. Only the wind sighed about him. There were no noises of birds or small animals.

She came around a fold of the peak, descending the ridge quickly in a half-trot. He wanted to weep. He'd never be able to move that fast. Sighing softly, he aimed the rifle carefully, slowly. As he started to fire, she looked up and her gaze seared his sight. He cried out and the shot went wild. His eyes teared and he trembled and was nauseous.

When his vision cleared he looked again. She was gone.

"Damn you!" he shouted, "whatever you are."

The center of Albuquerque was fused, rusted wreckage, where there was anything left standing at all. What the blast had left, the long nuclear winter had destroyed. The remains of buildings were as silent as shadows.

Still, the scent of death drew her, a desperate, unconscious reaching out of the dying. She trotted through the ruins, stopping here, there, trying to find it. A mottled scrub grass had grown between bricks, mortar and asphalt, rustling as she passed. It gave off a faint, sweet smell. She ignored it. The low fire of life smoldered nearby and she traced out its smoke.

Joe felt the poison enter him as he walked down from the mountains. He walked stiffly, dizzy most of the time, the smell of his own sickness blotting out all others. Her trail grew harder to find, as if she walked lighter on the ground. He took his time. Patience was no virtue for him now, but a necessity. He had no strength for mistakes, for frustration. He knew he had to hurry, but had no ability to do so. His sight was awash with patches of gray and he had lost feeling in his fingers and toes.

The trail straightened towards the center of town and brought him to the edge of the blast crater. The crater was not even or sharp, but crumbled and fallen inward towards its heart from the long winter erosion. Ice still clung to the sides and crevices hidden in shadow. Only the drip of the water could be heard.

Down, into the crater she went, listening, following down to the crater's

center. A man lay there, leaning against a smooth boulder, sipping from a canteen.

"Afternoon," he said.

She stopped in confusion. The man was white.

Coyote stepped beside her. "Ah, so these are the lives you save."

He looked at her clearly. Next to him was a pack and a rifle. "You can have what I've got. It won't do me much good, anyhow."

"What are you doing here?" She sat on the ground across from him, not knowing what to do, wanting to gather him as she had gathered the others, but not sure she should.

He chuckled deep in his throat. "Dying, of course. I don't want to wait anymore." He looked at her quizzically. "Do I know you?"

She shook her head. He doesn't know, she thought. The others knew when they saw her, or spoke to her. All but her son, she amended.

"I stayed in the shelter at Sandia Labs for a while," he continued. "The others left early. Or got sick. I was the last. Not anything special or stronger or better, just the last there. Somebody always has to be the last." He looked at her. "I stayed there all winter." He shrugged. "Then, I thought. What's the point? I came here and stayed in the ruins until I got sick. I could've gone into the mountains. I could have lived on the rations in the shelter. But I didn't care. The difference between living and dying seemed trivial. I wanted it to be over." He looked at her again. "You're sure I don't know you?" Again, she shook her head. He smiled vaguely. "Maybe you're someone I'm supposed to meet."

Joe heard them as he came near. He made sure the Winchester had a shell in the chamber, cocked it. He pointed it ahead of him hoping he could fire before she blinded him again. He rounded the boulder and saw her before the white man.

A white man.

"You would save *him*?" he cried out and fired.

Listens-to-the-River felt a fist strike her in the stomach. She was knocked to the ground and lay there stunned, bleeding. No, she struggled silently, it must not end here.

"Die, old woman," said Coyote into her ear. "Die with the rest of us."

She tried to call the souls together to help her, to mend her, but she was confused, frightened, hurt. They slipped from her grasp, close but untouchable.

The white man threw his canteen at Joe and struck him in the face. The sudden pain made Joe drop his gun. The man grabbed the gun and hit him in the head with it. It was a weak blow, but Joe was weak and fell moaning.

Listens felt her life, and all their lives, leaking. She saw the white man bending over her. Recognition dawned in his eyes. "I know you,

Azreal," he breathed, beginning to weep. "Take me. Use me. Make it better."

She reached up and took him and his strength joined with hers. The blood slowed, then stopped. She breathed shallowly and knit herself together. When she could, she opened her eyes and sat up.

"You now hold them inside of you," said Coyote. He seemed to be leaning against the boulder, unable to stand. "Their death. Their poison."

She gasped for air. "You told me we are all human, remember? We carry our own poison." She stood. "Follow me no more."

"What right—"

"No right. I am not the best there could have been, but I am the best there is. I will gather as many as I can." She walked up the towards the crater's rim.

Joe sat up shook his head. Coyote bent over him. "Coyote-spirit," he breathed.

"You must stop her. Shoot her."

He found the gun a few steps away, next to the body of the white man. "No, Coyote," he said slowly.

"She killed your wife. Your child." Coyote tried to take him by the shirt but could not grasp the leather. "Please. Kill her."

The white man dead was just a man. As Joe was just a man. "No," he said again.

The wind blew the desert cold into the crater. It would freeze before morning, Joe knew. He could smell winter in the air. A fire burned before him from a store the white man had brought with him into the crater. Why he had brought such a store, Joe did not know. But then, he did not know much about the white man, or for that matter, much about white men in general. The body he had piled stones over.

The fire warmed him. As he felt winter in the air, so he knew soon he would grow sick and die.

"May I sit with you?" came a voice.

Coyote stepped into the light.

Joe smiled. "Of course. I've trapped you for your skin all of my life. I'd welcome your company as the last of your kind."

"You seem in better spirits."

He shrugged. "I am waiting for morning."

"As am I."

Joe looked up. "What do you mean?"

Coyote smiled through rotten and broken teeth. "My kind, as you say, are almost no more. The last die far from here. By morning I, too, will be no more."

"What is a world without Coyotes?" Joe whispered.

"My feelings exactly."

Joe stared into the fire for a long time. "I have no vision, nor any dream to guide me. Can I hold you, as my mother holds men?"

Coyote was silent so long that Joe looked up. Across the fire, Coyote reached out to him and they embraced. He reached out with Coyote's sight and took the dying coyotes to him and stood, warm and strong throughout now, beneath the stars. He felt other kinds of spirits near him now, rustling, the animal companions of his tribesmen for generations. Some were close, some were further away. He would go to them.

He smiled into the firelight. ●

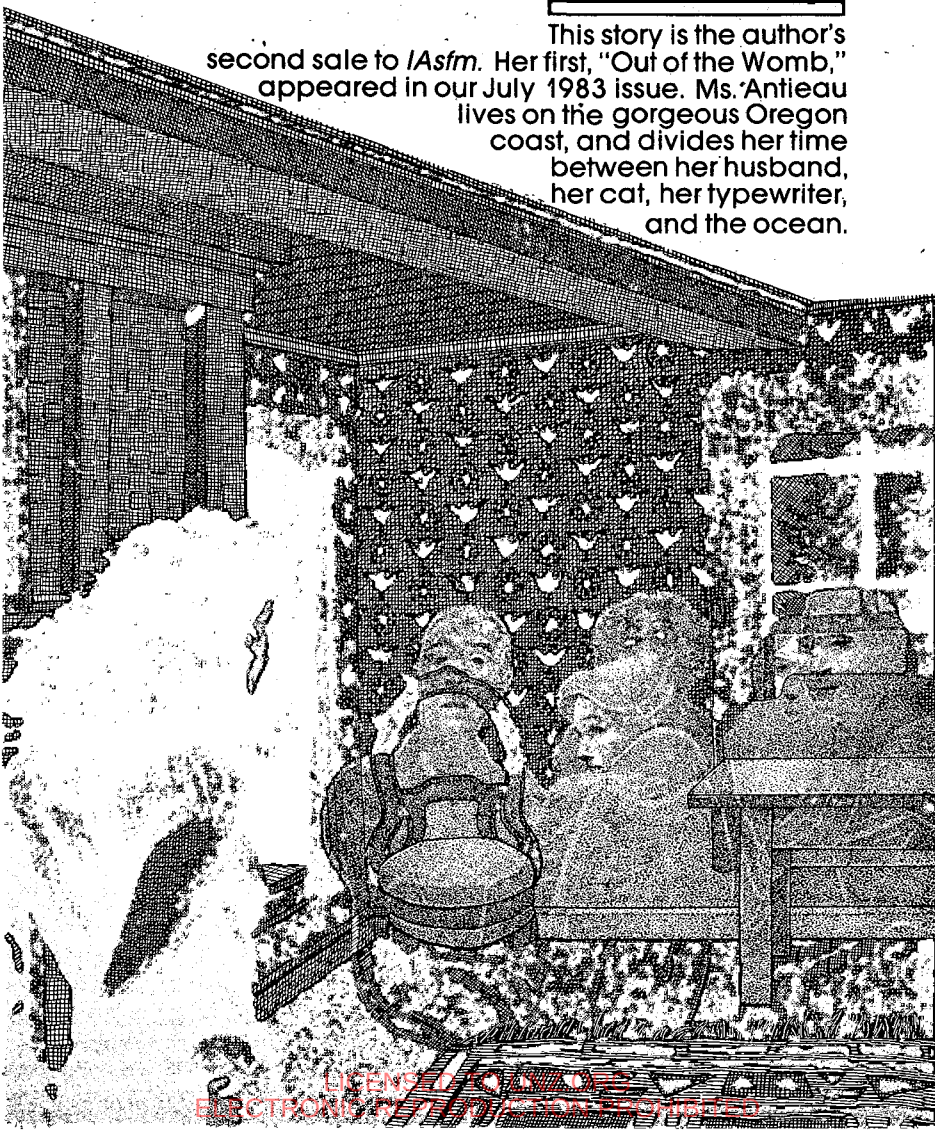


Running a Muck, by John Caldwell © 1978 used by permission of Writer's Digest Books.

by Kim Antieau

HAUNTINGS

This story is the author's second sale to *Asfm*. Her first, "Out of the Womb," appeared in our July 1983 issue. Ms. Antieau lives on the gorgeous Oregon coast, and divides her time between her husband, her cat, her typewriter, and the ocean.



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Kate awakened to the sound of her name being whispered in her ear, to the feel of warm breath on her cheek. She let the dream ebb away, taking with it the sound and warmth before she opened her eyes to darkness.

"Kate," the whisperer said again, sighing, settling and creaking as all houses do in the quiet of night.

Still not fully awake, Kate switched on the light over her bed. Eerie shadows gave way to reveal her ordinary bedroom: faded peach wallpaper, painted ceramic light fixtures, jeans and shirt strewn on a chair, a black and white television set. The sound was gone.

She took a drink of water from the glass that was always on the night stand. She drank a great deal of water now, as if it could wash her clean if she drank enough of it. She yawned and settled back against her pillow. The whispering didn't frighten her. She had grown accustomed to the occasional noises in the two weeks she had lived in the nineteenth century farmhouse. They were almost company to her.

Except now they were disturbing her sleep even more than usual. She liked her time in her dreams. In them, she was usually well, whole; no one had taken a knife to her, no one had injected poisons into her.

She turned the light off. In the morning, she supposed, she'd have to find out why the house talked to her.

"Can I help you find anything, Mrs. Hein?" the librarian asked. Kate looked up and smiled. Everyone in Canyons insisted on calling her Mrs. even though her last name was different from her husband's. All they knew was that she was married, so she was Mrs. Hein to them.

"Call me Kate, please," Kate said, closing the book in front of her. "Maybe you can help. Do you know anything about the Nelson farmhouse?"

"You mean the house you bought?" he asked, sitting down next to her. On this sunny Monday afternoon, the library was empty except for Kate and the librarian. "It's been researched extensively by our historical society—of which I am a member. It hasn't been declared a historical landmark or anything—not architecturally unique enough—but it is one of our older homes. The society has pictures of it and of the people who lived in it. Their office is just across the courtyard."

"Before I bought it had the Nelsons always owned it?"

He shook his head. "It was built by a family from back east in the 1890s. They had money and decided to come here and get back to nature."

"People were doing that back then, too, eh?" Kate said, laughing. One of the reasons she had moved to Canyons was because there was no industry, no waste dumps, and plenty of land to grow her own food.

"I can't remember their names, something simple though," he said.

"They owned it for about fifty years. Then they sold it to a distant cousin and moved back to New York. This cousin married a Nelson and it was kept in their family after that. They overfarmed the land, though, and they couldn't make any money, so they finally left. It was up for sale two years before you bought it."

"Any rumors of unusual happenings?" Kate asked.

The librarian glanced at her books *Poltergeists* and *Hauntings*.

"Nary a word," he said, "and I would have heard. It seems it was quite a happy home."

"Any Indian burial grounds nearby?"

The librarian laughed and stood up. "Nope. We didn't have Indians in that area. You're going to have to settle with just your run-of-the-mill ordinary house."

"Thanks." She turned back to her stack of books and magazines and he went back to the check-out counter. Leafing through one of the magazines, the headline "Laetrile: Hope of the Future" caught her attention. She quickly turned the page. She never wanted to see another cancer article. When she had first found out she had cancer, she had read them all—after the initial frightened vomiting ended and the terrified night sweats lessened in frequency. For a time, she had thought about going the "natural" route, healing with foods and state of mind. In the end, she decided she couldn't trust her mind not to make the disease worse, so she had allowed surgery and chemotherapy.

She pushed away from the table and quickly left the library. Anger whirled around her as she stepped into the sunshine; the anger swelled in her and turned into fear. They said she was free of cancer now. What did they know? In twenty years when she was just over fifty, she would probably get cancer from the chemo and have to go through it all over again. She shivered and pulled the sweater closer to her. The house. She had to concentrate on the house. She crossed the courtyard and went toward the historical society office.

"Can I come for a visit soon?" Jeff asked over the phone. "It's been two weeks, Katie. I miss you."

"I thought you had an assignment," Kate said. She pulled the long telephone cord around with her as she walked from one end of the huge farm kitchen to the other. It was an uneconomical space, but the painted blue walls and the Dutch ceramic tiles made her feel cozy. The white cupboards stretched to the ceiling and Kate envisioned shelf upon shelf of Kerr canning jars filled with peaches, apples, tomatoes.

"Winter has set in there early this year," Jeff said, "so they cancelled it until spring."

"Spring?" Kate said, taking the tea kettle off the burner. The piercing whistle slowly hiccupped to a stop. "That's six months."

"Yeah," he said. "Maybe by then you'll want to come back to work. Hint, hint."

Kate stopped moving. "I'm through, Jeff. Period. I like it here." There was silence on the other end. "Whatsamatter, don't you like your new partner?" she joked.

"He's not fun to cuddle with and he's not my partner," he said. "You and I are still under contract."

That much was true; they owed their publisher three books. She had been writing the texts and Jeff had been taking the photographs for their travel books since before they left college. They had just started branching out into more naturalistic settings (versus tourist spots) when Kate had gotten sick.

"I love you," he said. He sighed. "If you still need time alone, I understand."

She bit the inside of her cheek so she wouldn't cry. They had never been apart for this long, and even though it was her choice and it was temporary, she missed him.

"Come this weekend," she said.

Kate liked the house. In some ways it reminded her of her childhood—though when she really thought about it, she knew it was her father's childhood it reminded her of. She didn't want to think about her own past. What she had believed had been an idyllic child's life now seemed tainted with all the things that should have been done: her parents should have fed her better foods, they shouldn't have put her through the stress of a custody battle when she was a teen-ager, and they should have known they lived two miles from the most toxic waste dump in the state. She leaned back in the chair, stretching her legs across the table. It made her too angry, the past, because there was not a thing she could do about it. It was just a compilation of "ifs".

The house shifted, and Kate let all thoughts of her past slip away. It was the house's past she was interested in now. The library and the historical society had not given her any clues as to why the house made noises; perhaps the house itself could.

"The attic," she said, dropping her feet from the coffee table and standing up. She glanced out the window at the fading light, wondering if she wanted to go into the attic at night, especially the attic of a haunted house. Heroines of horror novels were often doing things just like this and she'd always thought they were a bit stupid. She laughed; the sound vibrated around her, as if the walls were enjoying the sound. Kate was not afraid of the house; and she was not a heroine.

The attic was brightly lit by a line of fluorescent lights a previous owner had installed. Except for a worktable and several boxes strewn in different corners, the room was empty. What little there was of Kate's things was still downstairs. Between buying the house and maintaining an apartment in the city, they had had little money left over for her to buy furnishings.

Kate knelt on the floor and began examining the boxes. Two of them were filled with moth-eaten clothes. Another box contained homemade Christmas decorations.

"Bingo," Kate said as she opened the last box and began taking out papers. Twenty-year-old grocery and utility bills. She dug deeper and found several letters. All were newsy, chatty letters from relatives asking the Nelsons about their rural life. At the bottom of the box were three letters written by Agatha Nelson to Aunt Betty Carens which had never been mailed: "The new calf is doing better. . . . We need rain. . . . The cows got loose in the alfalfa patch and gorged themselves." Folded in with Agatha's third letter was a faded page written in someone else's hand: ". . . Look what I found in the attic," Agatha had written. "Nellie Smith was one of the original owners. Please return this to me . . ."

Smiths and Nelsons. Thé all-American farmhouse. Nellie Smith's letter was like a piece of a diary, addressed to no one in particular. She described the farm and then the house: "The house is completed now, and we are settled in. I love it here away from the city. It is still in this house as if there is no past or future, just now—or as if it were all one time and what happened or will does not matter . . ."

Kate smiled and tucked the letter into her pocket to show to Jeff later. Perhaps one day she would develop Nellie's philosophy and none of it would matter to her either. She switched off the lights and went down the stairs.

"You're too ordinary," Kate said. "Maybe that's why you're haunted."

She brought herbal tea and peanut butter cookies up to her bedroom and turned on a romantic comedy from the fifties. She skimmed through the book on hauntings. It told her nothing new. Dead people haunted houses. Period.

She snapped the book shut and opened the one on poltergeists. They were usually short-term phenomena revolving around one person, often a troubled adolescent. It had not occurred to her that she could be causing the sounds, that perhaps it was all in her head. She was not a troubled teen-ager, but she was not a particularly happy adult.

When Kate awakened that night, the only noise she heard was coming

from the marsh pond over her back hill. She sat up and drank from her glass. The clock read 2:45.

Feeling irritable, Kate got out of bed and went downstairs. She had not slept through an entire night in nearly two years.

She took an orange from the refrigerator and went into the living room and sank into her chair. Through the open curtains, she could see the back yard, touched with a bit of fairyland by the moonlight.

"Kate," the room whispered.

Kate sat up straight and looked around the room. It was bathed in a white glow—moonlight—and something else in the middle of the room.

Shimmering half there and half not was a woman. Kate blinked. The woman appeared to be sitting, her arms outstretched, her hands flat against something. Her image wavered, and Kate thought she saw someone else sitting next to her. The image faded and was gone.

Kate sat very still for a long while. When the clock chimed four, she went back upstairs.

The next morning, Kate was still not frightened, and it puzzled her. Normal everyday Janes did not see ghosts. Perhaps the chemo had fried her brain a bit, or it had opened it up for new experiences. She took a long walk on her property and then spent the rest of the day putting the house into order. She could hardly wait until it was dark.

After supper, she read a book to put her to sleep and was not surprised to come awake just before 3:00.

She hurried downstairs and sat in her chair, waiting for the woman in white, concentrating only on seeing her. Then, as if it were quite natural, the woman was there again. This time, as she came into view, Kate saw she really wasn't wearing white, there was just a glow around her body. The image wavered and solidified. Five people sat around a table, their hands joined. She didn't recognize any of them from the photos she'd seen of the Smiths and Nelsons.

"Kate? Are you there?" the whisperer said. The woman looked up, her head moving as if in slow motion, the white glow shaking and then becoming still when she stopped.

They looked as though they were having a seance. Kate remembered holding seances on overnight camping trips when she'd been a Girl Scout. It had been an excuse to giggle and scream. These people looked quite serious. And they were calling her? It couldn't be. They were the ghosts; she was alive. It had to be another Kate.

Hesitating, Kate got up from her chair and moved closer.

"I can feel something," one of them whispered, the words floating through the house like a breeze through autumn-dried leaves.

"Kate, if you're there, give us a sign," the dark-haired woman said.

Kate giggled, a Girl Scout again.

"I am here," she said.

The woman nodded, as if she'd expected it all along.

"How are you, Kate Hein?" the woman asked.

Startled, Kate stopped walking around the circle.

"What? How?"

"Don't be frightened," the woman said.

"Ask her about Jenny. Have you seen my daughter Jenny? She's been dead three weeks," said another woman.

"Let me—" the dark-haired woman tried to interrupt.

"Can you tell us what it's like? Being dead?" a man asked.

Kate backed up and crashed into a table. Five heads turned toward her. "Look, there she is."

Someone screamed. The clock began chiming. The image faded away.

Kate breathed deeply, listening to her heart. The house's silence pounded at her ears. Her cotton night shirt felt soft against her skin. Her mouth was dry. And she felt the floor firmly beneath her. She saw the moon outside. She had to be alive. She pinched her arm; it hurt.

What was happening? Had she died on the operating table and this was hell? No, it was too pleasant. Maybe heaven. This was what it was like to die and you never found out unless someone summoned you via a seance.

She ran to the phone and dialed her apartment.

"Jeff? It's Kate. Jeff, you've got to tell me. Did I die when I was operated on?"

"What?" he asked sleepily. "What are you talking about? Are you all right? Of course you didn't die."

"How do you know?" she asked, and then realized he wouldn't know if he was part of it all. This was crazy. Impossible. There had to be another reason.

"I'll leave now, Kate, and be there tomorrow night," he said.

She didn't object. She told him to drive carefully and hung up the phone. Sitting in the kitchen, she listened to the birds come awake one by one.

She didn't want to work anymore. She had told Jeff that during the treatments.

"I want to live in the country and enjoy life," she said. "All I'll need is food, and I'll grow my own."

"Why can't we live in the country and work, too?" Jeff had asked.

"I didn't say we," she said. "I'm not going to make you live in the country. You'd hate it."

"How can you know that when I don't?"

One thing about her past she wouldn't change was Jeff. He had always

been there when she needed him, always supportive. When she had gotten sick, she found herself moving away from him, half angry with him all the time.

Now she wished he would get there. She looked out the window again. It would be dark soon, and she didn't want to be alone, didn't want to think she was dead.

There had to be another explanation. She thought of the dark-haired ghost woman and her companions, trying to remember everything: perhaps details would help her. The woman asking after Jennifer had worn a red smock that matched her bright red hair; the dark-haired woman had on jeans and a sweater; one man looked as if he had on a robe. She couldn't see their faces clearly enough to describe them. The table had a shiny surface, perhaps glass, reflecting the light of a single candle. Were they people from another part of the world, their thoughts linked with hers?

That did not explain why they thought she was dead.

Jeff's car rolled across the gravel driveway. Looking concerned, he got out of the car and ran toward the house. She opened the door, and they embraced. He smelled of Jeff, a warm musky smell that made her hold him tighter.

"I missed you," she said.

He pulled away and looked down at her.

"Are you all right?" he asked.

"Come on in. I'll tell you all about it."

She related her experiences while they sipped tea and ate brightly colored salad, losing some of her fear as she talked. Jeff took the story at face value, just as she knew he would.

"So you thought you were dead?"

She grimaced and then smiled. "I never overreact, do I?"

"Oh no," he said. "When you found out you were sick, you called to have your tombstone made the next day."

"Luckily I decided not to tempt fate," she said, laughing. "Let's come downstairs tonight and see if you can figure out what is going on. Are you up to it?"

"I'll go to sleep after I eat, and you can wake me when it's time."

Kate put Jeff to bed, tucking him in as if he were a child.

"I left some things in the car," he murmured before drifting off.

Kate put on the floodlight and went outside. Inside the car were all of their plants, three suitcases, and Lockheart, their cat, asleep on a pile of clothes. She opened her eyes, meowed and stretched. Kate shook her head and picked the cat up. She protested at first; she was fond of the car, but she soon realized Kate was warmer.

Kate had not wanted the cat or the plants, and she felt a twinge of anger as she unloaded the car. They all required responsibility. Plants needed water; cats had to be fed. And people got sick and died. Of course, Jeff could not have called neighbors up at 3:00 A.M. and asked them to cat and plant sit.

Once inside, Lockheart sniffed at her litter box and food and then padded upstairs to sleep with Jeff. Just like home, Kate thought.

When she grew tired, Kate went to bed, curling herself around Jeff and the cat. At 2:30, she shook Jeff awake. They shut the door behind them and went down to the living room where they sat in the dark until it was almost three. Kate began to wonder if it would happen at all; perhaps she had made it up. Then the woman shimmered into view.

"Kate Hein, come back to us. We didn't mean to frighten you," the woman said. The others joined her.

"Do you see them?" Kate whispered. She was relieved when Jeff nodded; she hadn't made it all up.

Kate stood and went to them. Tonight she could see more details: a counter behind the table, a beauty mark on the man's left cheek, a window—her window.

"Give us a sign," the woman said.

Reaching into the light, Kate picked up a cup from the counter. She couldn't feel it, but it moved and crashed to the floor. They all jumped.

Kate pulled her hand back. The clock chimed. She looked at Jeff, and the picture faded.

Jeff fumbled with the light and then sat down.

"Let me sit for a minute," he said.

Kate heard the cat crying upstairs. She went up and let her out.

"They looked different," Jeff said as she came down. "Didn't they? Their clothes. That room. It was like this one only a bit different."

"I know. The clothes weren't old-fashioned," Kate said. She smiled. "Not like I would have expected from ghosts."

"They did call to you," he said. "Maybe there's another Kate Hein somewhere."

"They're calling to her in this house? Doubtful," she said. "Why would they be in this room, in this house, calling me? Why do they think I'm dead? I'm not!"

"You will be someday in the future," he said, "in the far, far future."

"I'll be dead in the future. Yes, that's right," she said, suddenly excited. "I'm not dead now but I will be in the future, Jeff, so *they* could be from the future. Instead of holding a seance and getting the dead me, they get the past, with me in it."

"A kind of time travel?"

"I suppose," she answered, pacing the room. "Maybe in the future this

house is haunted—strange noises in the night, things like that. Maybe I grow old and die here. They think I'm the one who is haunting the house, so they call me. To me the house is haunted, too, but it's haunted by the future! A window which goes both ways."

She laughed. "Think of it! Maybe many of the so-called haunted houses are really time windows—pieces of the future or past flickering back and forth with no one ever suspecting because both ends believe it's the nether regions."

"That's a better explanation than your first one," Jeff said.

Lockheart jumped onto Jeff's lap and he stroked her.

"I wish there was one of these windows in the house I grew up in," Kate said, stopping to gaze across the yard.

Jeff sighed. "Why? So you could tell little Katie to eat right and move away from the dump? What would that have accomplished? Your parents would have taken you to a shrink and you would have grown up terrified of this woman who told you you would get cancer," Jeff said. "You can't change the past."

She walked across the room and dropped down on her knees in front of his chair. "But maybe I can change the future. Those people know who I am, for some reason; and in their time I'm dead. They could tell me why and how. I would know." She grabbed his hands. "I could stop being afraid. No more ifs."

"Katie," he said, cupping her face in his hands. "What does it matter? You can't live the future or the past. What if you find out I die in two years or you die a pauper or you win the Pulitzer or you live to be a hundred? Would you want to know any of those things ahead of time, really?"

She moved away from him.

"How can you understand? How can you sit there and pretend you do? You don't have a timebomb inside of you!"

"Is that why you've been so angry with me?" he asked. "Because I didn't get sick? Well, how do you know I don't have a 'timebomb' inside of me?" He started to leave the room. She reached for his arm.

"Don't you see? That's what I'm afraid of."

The house seemed even more warm and alive the next morning. Lockheart climbed along the counters while Jeff fixed breakfast.

"I tried the tractor again the other day," Kate said as they ate. "It still works. I wish it were spring so I could plant. All organic. I'll have complete control."

"I? Aren't you going to let me help?"

"It's something I want to do by myself," she answered. "Besides, I doubt you'll be here much of the time, will you? What would you do out here?"

"Eat what you grow," he said. "This is an interesting part of the state. We could do a back to nature book. I married you for better or worse. Don't the vows hold for both of us?"

"That's not nice," Kate said.

"I don't feel nice, Katie," he said. "I want to be with you, but only in the here and now, not with you angry about the past and worrying about the future."

Kate looked at her food and wished the night would come.

She moved slowly out of bed, trying not to disturb the cat or Jeff.

"Don't tell me," Jeff whispered. "Whatever you learn, I don't want to know."

She started to answer him, but instead she tiptoed out of the room and went downstairs. She sat in the chair waiting for her future and thinking about her past.

What she didn't like about the past was that she had no control of it: she had trusted the world to let her grow up unharmed, and it had failed her. Her doctor had told her she shouldn't blame her illness on any one thing: it was a combination of factors, nothing she could do about it now. She felt the anger ball in her. Nothing she could do now, but soon she would know her future and she would be prepared.

But would that give her more choices? Or would she just feel as if she were a puppet or actor playing out a role?

Was Jeff a part of her future? Jeff, the cat, and the plants the cat was always eating? She smiled. She liked the house better with them all in it.

The woman came into being in a milky glow, followed by the others.

"Are you there, Kate Hein?" the woman whispered.

"I'm here," Kate answered.

The people looked at each other and then warily about the room.

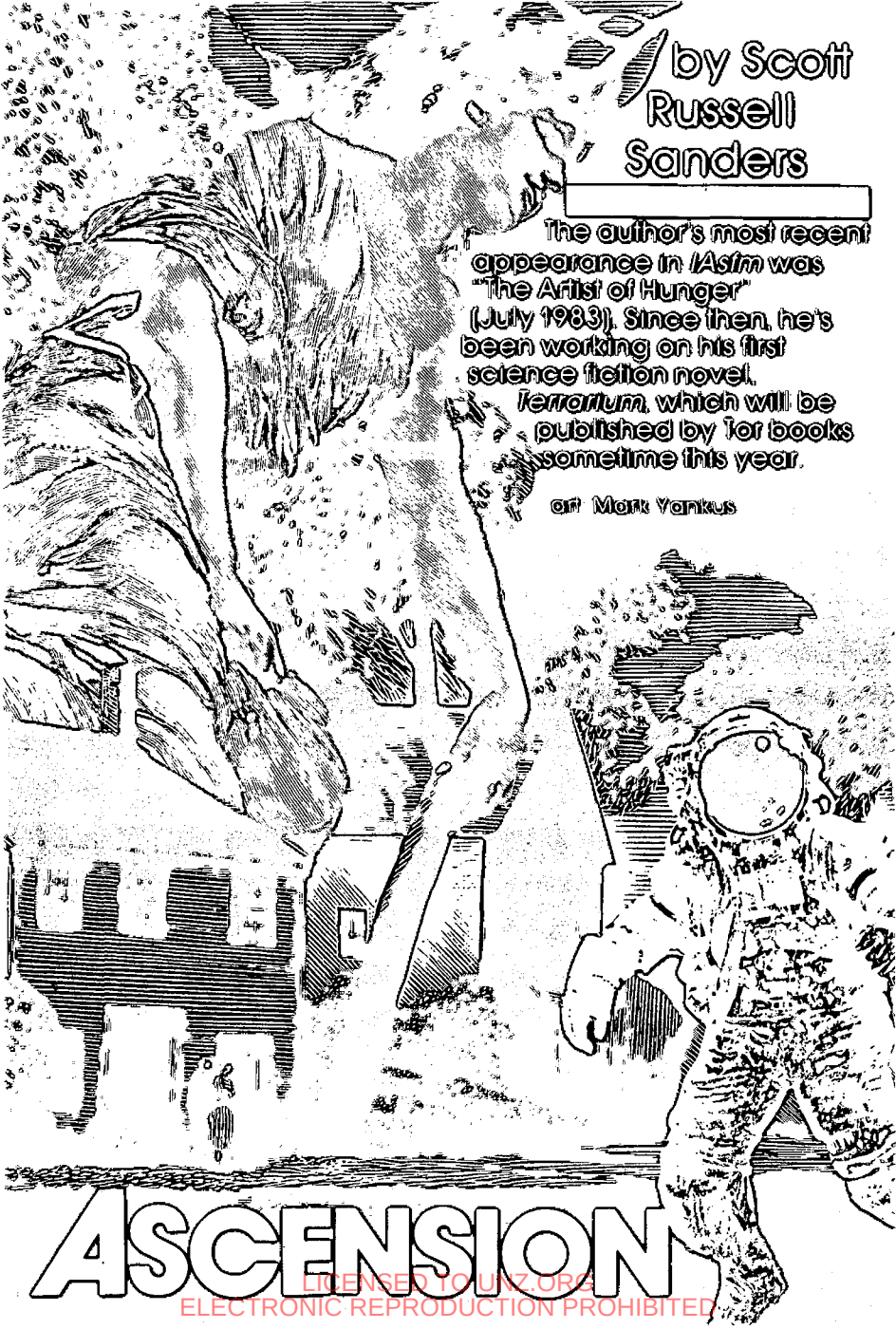
"Ask her," the other woman said.

"Kate, Mrs. Packard wants to know if you've had contact with her daughter Jennifer. Jenny passed away a short time ago."

Kate looked around the room. The plants made pointed silhouettes in the dark. Upstairs she heard Lockheart scratching at the door. She rubbed her stomach where she was still warm from Jeff's body pressed against hers as they slept.

"Tell Mrs. Packard that Jennifer is here with us, and she sends her love."

The clock struck three, and the window closed: ●



by Scott
Russell
Sanders

The author's most recent appearance in *Asim* was "The Artist of Hunger" (July 1983). Since then, he's been working on his first science fiction novel,

Terratum, which will be published by Tor books sometime this year.

art Mark Yankus

ASCENSION

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The sleep of the townspeople had already been disturbed for weeks before the night of the mayor's startling exhibition. At dawn on those mornings, when garbage trucks began filling the air with the raucous music of their grinding, in every street heads were still flopping like beached fish on pillows and hands were still plucking at sweaty sheets. Children trudged off to school with eyes closed, their legs finding the way by memory, relying on the guards to help them across traffic. The guards leaned on their portable stop signs and listened for the squeal of brakes. With grownup eyes as round and empty as the mouths of canning jars, mechanics slouched off to garages, clerks to the bank, shoe-keepers to their stores, telephonists and executives to their plate-glass offices, everyone wrapped in a fog of drowsiness.

"It is the heat," muttered some of those who still possessed enough vigor to search for explanations. Indeed, no one, not even the ninety-two-year-old man who cleaned fish at the dock, could remember a hotter July. Instead of cooling off at night when the breezes swept in from the ocean, the land stayed warm. The houses were slow ovens. But the owners of powerful air-conditioners, able to stay cool yet unable to sleep, dismissed the heat theory. A butcher had gone so far as to bed down in his meat locker, with an alarm clock to prevent him from sleeping too long and thereby turning into a block of ice, and he reported that even the chill of his freezer, where the season was always a January midnight, had failed to soothe him into slumber.

Many of the old-timers blamed the plague of sleeplessness on the erratic tides. Waters lapped high at the pilings of docks and laid bare the granite bones of the shore at unexpected hours. "It's all topsy-turvy," they complained. "Even the barnacles are confused." But the young people, who were inclined to ignore the ocean, plugged their ears against the tides and still could find no rest. Perhaps, they speculated, the shellfish of the bay had been poisoned by the factories and refineries that lined the southern shore. This theory was also quickly discredited, for the vocal vegetarians and haters of seafood, who would not have swallowed an oyster or sucked on lobster for love or money, testified about their own wakeful nights.

Alone among the townspeople, the mayor's wayward husband, Kenneth, dozed serenely. He would tumble into bed soon after supper and rest as motionless as a fallen tree until mid-morning; in between he slept the blank sleep of babies. This was so dramatic a reversal of his customary insomnia that the mayor could not help but wonder at the transformation. Sally had abundant opportunity to wonder, since she herself could scarcely sleep a wink. Early in the summer, before the heat became oppressive, Kenneth had ordered an astronaut's suit by mail from Space Surplus, Inc., and now he spent his nights sealed inside it, breathing

bottled air. The mayor had not begrudged the expense for the suit. Any show of enthusiasm on Kenneth's part was cause for rejoicing. Although his studio was filled with cameras, video recorders, woodworking tools, a potter's wheel, and other expensive gear, all of it lying untouched, Sally kept hoping that some new infatuation might catapult him out of the trough of despair in which he had been wallowing for nearly three years.

The mayor could estimate the length of her husband's despair with great accuracy, for it was almost exactly as old as their marriage. They had met on the operating table, she as patient and he as surgeon. Sally had not been mayor then, merely director of the waterworks, and it was her own inner waterworks that Kenneth was repairing with his scalpel and sutures. All she glimpsed before the wave of anesthesia washed over her were the surgeon's green eyes, which had about them the distant look of a grounded pilot recalling dangerous flights. Evidently he bungled the operation, for when she emerged from the feverish nightmare of tubes and needles to the daylight of consciousness, the first landmark she glimpsed was his apologetic face, asking her to marry him.

"It's the least I can do," he explained.

"I don't plan to sue," she mumbled.

His green eyes focused on her with fierce attention, a pilot's glare at the runway. "I'd like to marry you anyway."

"Nonsense," she declared.

Six months later she went through with it, having tested his resolve and his cooking and his taste in art. By then they were stuck together by the glue of talk, late night talk after he staggered home from the hospital, early morning talk before she slipped away to the waterworks, gab under umbrellas and over stoves and in beds, his bed, her bed, their bed, dollops of words about the burnout of their first marriages, about their work, their secret love of wildflowers, their closet fears. Not long after the wedding, when Sally was named city engineer, Kenneth bungled another operation, and then another. Obviously he could not amend every mistake by marrying the victim, even if all the victims had been female, which they weren't.

When the patient lay muffled in green sheets on the operating table, a rectangle of vulnerable skin exposed to the knife, Kenneth began thinking of warps in space, polar ice caps, rifts in the floor of the ocean. He knew from browsing through stacks of gleaming science magazines that the curvatures of space were ushering ion storms, and quite possibly aliens, toward earth. The glaciers were melting. The plates of the globe were skipping about like lambs. Soon after reading an account of cosmic dangers, he lapsed during surgery into a meditation on the hungry menace posed by black holes, and only returned to the here-and-now when

a resident assistant gingerly pointed out to him that he had opened a red hole at some inappropriate location inside the patient. How could he concentrate on the geometry of incisions while the earth careened helplessly through space? Fretting about the life expectancy of humanity; Kenneth shortened the life expectancy of more than one representative of the species.

"That's it," he announced, following his second conviction for malpractice. "I quit."

Busy winning the mayor's election, Sally did not quarrel with his decision, not even when he began shuffling around their glass-walled house rubbing his idle hands together like a mourner beside a crash site. Those hands were as firm and steady as ever, he was quick to point out. Unlike many surgeons who retire in their forties, Kenneth had not lost his touch. What he had lost was his concentration. When he made love to Sally his fingers would pluck the cords of her body with a harpist's delicacy, teasing tunes from her bones, and then suddenly they would flutter to stillness and his eyes would roll shut and his mind would soar out among the orbiting anxieties—the killer satellites, the lasers parked overhead, the incoming asteroids, the bombs that cruised in the airless gloom of space.

"Come back, come back," she would cry, playfully at first, then with the mewling complaint of a seagull, and at last with a lightning-crack of anger.

In those early days of their marriage, Kenneth was the one who could never sleep. Exhausted by the recurrent squalls in the mayor's office—zoning ordinances, sewage treatments, harbor renovations, tax deals—Sally dozed while Kenneth sat up through the night reading scenarios for disaster. At breakfast, his eyes glazed with fatigue, he would tell her about the dwindling calcium content in the eggshells of pelicans, about acid rain and solar flares, about bizarre forms of radiation, about the menagerie of unstable beasts discovered in the nucleus of atoms. "Did you realize that the sun is already middle-aged?" Kenneth announced over scrambled eggs.

"Is that so?" she replied. "Another English muffin?"

"If either the chloroplasts or the mitochondria mutate," he pointed out to her, "we're all washed up. Done for. Kaput."

Sally filtered these midnight fears through the grid of her engineer's skepticism. Sufficient unto the day are the evils thereof, she thought, stuffing her briefcase with notes on the day's abundant troubles. One by one the ailments of the town crossed her desk, a parade of problems, and one by one she wrestled them into submission. The explosion of a boiler in the basement of a nursing home was an accident she could prevent by shrewd planning, but she could not prevent the sun from going nova.

She could arrange for carpenters in gas masks to remove asbestos ceiling tiles from the gradeschool corridors, and thus protect the lungs of the young, but she could not forestall the thinning of the earth's ozone layer. If Kenneth saw fit to lie awake brooding on catastrophes, thumbing his slick magazines and yellowed paperbacks, that was no reason for Sally to ruin her own rest.

"Killer bees," he warned her in the wee hours. "Neurolinguistic programming. Plutonium, iridium, hot iodine in mother's milk." And when she rolled away from him with a groan, he seized her by the shoulder and declared, "In zero-gee your bones will grow brittle. In zero-gee the webs of spiders become tangled snarls. In zero-gee sperm cannot find the egg."

Shortly before the arrival of the astronaut's suit, Kenneth erupted into the mayor's sleep one morning at 3:00 A.M. by announcing, "Do you realize that bacteria from a meteorite could set off a worldwide epidemic?"

The mayor squeezed a pillow about her ears and dove back into her dreams. Those were among the last dreams she was able to swim through so peacefully for a long while, however, because on the following night Kenneth donned the astronaut's suit at bedtime, and Sally's insomnia began.

"You're kidding," she protested, when he began shoving his legs into the silvery suit.

"Would you zip me up the back?" he asked.

"I thought it was only to look at, and to show the neighborhood kids."

"Reach me that helmet, will you?"

After the bubble helmet was snapped into place and the airtubes were connected, his voice emerged by way of a microphone, like a pilot droning instructions to his passengers. "If you ever notice this needle creeping over toward the red zone," he said, pointing to a glass dial on his chest, "give me more oxygen. And if you hear a beeping sound, call the ambulance."

That first night, unused to the whistling of the airtubes, which reminded her of the whine of trucktires careening past her childhood house, Sally slept fitfully. The second night she dozed off for no more than an hour or two. The third night she gave in to insomnia and began reading a three-volume government report on waste management. Kenneth meanwhile slumbered blissfully at her side, his face inside its plastic bubble as serene as that of a newborn in an incubator. In the mornings, he did not even stir when she left for work. He still cooked supper, but now he went about it hastily, for he spent the afternoons buying food and medicine and cans of fuel, which he stowed away in the basement.

"What on earth is all of this stuff *for*?" she demanded.

"My peace of mind," replied Kenneth.

She could not argue with that, not at first. The canned goods and freeze-dried foods would keep, as would the toothpaste and soap. If it made him feel more secure to stockpile supplies and to sleep in an astronaut's suit, she would indulge him. Her insomnia was bound to pass, as soon as she grew accustomed to the wheeze and purr of his life-support devices. There were, of course, some practical difficulties, one of which she mentioned toward the end of the first week of his spaceman era.

"How are we supposed to make love while you're wearing that contraption?" she inquired.

"There's an appropriate zipper," he replied.

"A zipper? I'm talking about eros, Kenneth, not the docking of spaceships."

"It's the best I can do."

"Would you consider going without the suit once in a while, for old time's sake?"

The look of panic in his eyes dissuaded her from pressing the point. "Perhaps I could come home for lunch instead of doing karate," she added soothingly, "and you could entertain me in the time-honored fashion."

"It would mean interrupting my shopping," he said with a frown.

One of the qualities which had lubricated Sally's glide through the tedious years of engineering studies and into the mayor's chair was an almost supernatural patience in the face of the world's puzzles and humanity's idiocies. But Kenneth's attachment to his spacesuit and his packrat accumulation of household goods were putting her character under severe strain. At the townhall, where the eyes of her staff members began to take on the hollowness of empty eggshells, she grew irritable. "I haven't been sleeping well," she apologized to her secretary after having scolded him.

"Neither have I," the secretary replied, whereupon Sally noticed for the first time how much the young man's haggard face resembled the granite cliffs of the harbor, scoured by eons of waves.

Everywhere the mayor looked, in fact, faces had been eroded by sleeplessness. Slyly questioning the clerks and accountants, who clustered drowsily around the drinking fountain like so many listless buffaloes at a waterhole, she discovered that a plague of insomnia had swept through town in the week since the arrival of her husband's spacesuit.

Winos hugging their rags curled up as usual in the doorway of the bus station, but kept hearing the shuffle of feet, the blare of departures. Children fresh from kindergarten sat up watching midnight movies, deepening their knowledge of mutants and warfare. Their younger brothers and sisters clamored for attention from one end of the day to the other; their parents took turns hiding in basements, in barns, in parked cars, anywhere to escape the siren wails of exhausted kids. Teachers

called in sick. Druggists sold out their supply of sleeping pills and began recommending warm milk to their bleary-eyed customers. Soon the dairy cases in grocery stores were stripped bare, and the smell of scorched milk filled the July streets. But even this soporific did not release the townspeople from the grip of wakefulness.

Not everyone complained about the insomnia plague, of course. All-night disk jockeys reported a dramatic rise in the number of requests for songs. "Play us some crooners," teenagers begged over the telephone. "Spin us some quiet stuff, low down and narky." Bowling alleys and cafes and bookstores kept their doors open, and doubled their business. All three cinemas facing on the town square, where the mayor would soon perform her startling exhibition, began screening film classics in the wee hours. Two abandoned gas stations were converted into thriving doughnut shops. Truckers cruising through town discovered that they could drive all the following night without the benefit of pills. Traveling salesreps contracted insomnia as soon as they checked in to local motels. This was no great inconvenience, however, since they quickly discovered that they could call on customers at any hour.

Skeptical of random correlations, Sally was reluctant at first to attribute the plague to Kenneth's spaceman antics. Nevertheless it was difficult for her to ignore the coincidence. While all the townspeople flopped irritably in their beds, he continued to slumber placidly though the nights, and then through the afternoons, and finally, by the fourth week of his life inside the suit, he began sleeping around the clock. Plastic tubes fed nutrients into his veins. Occasionally he would wake to scribble instructions for Sally on a clipboard that lay beside him on the bed: ADD SERUM EVERY FOURTH DAY. MAINTAIN OXYGEN PRESSURE IN BLUE ZONE. I LOVE YOU. Despite her engineer's training, Sally began to wonder whether Kenneth's intense slumber might be sucking sleep away from the neighborhood, as the notorious black hole was supposed to suck neighboring matter into its maw.

PLEASE, he wrote without opening his eyes, PLEASE PLEASE, IF YOU LOVE ME, DON'T OPEN MY SUIT.

Pinching his arm through its silvery sleeve, walking her fingers along his ticklish ribs, finally shaking the limp body until his head rattled inside the plastic helmet, Sally failed to waken him. The more she jostled him, the more serenely he smiled. Drugs? she wondered, eyeing the bag of pink fluid that drained into his arm. But the label seemed innocent enough, and so did the sample that the police lab tested for her. After Kenneth had slept for seventy-two hours straight, Sally called in the hospital pathologist, an old friend who could be trusted to keep mum about her husband's peculiar condition.

As the doctor entered the room, Kenneth sat up, eyes still shut in

blissful repose, and scrawled on the clipboard: IF YOU OPEN MY SUIT, I'LL EVAPORATE.

"I can't tell very much while he's inside that outfit," the doctor complained. But Sally knew her moody husband well enough to respect his bugaboos. So the doctor had to content herself with shining a light through the helmet, listening to Kenneth's heartbeat and measuring his blood-pressure. "It would appear to be normal sleep," concluded the doctor. "Has he been very tired lately?"

"He's been wrung out by worry for years," Sally conceded.

Now it was her turn to worry. Not really about Kenneth, who seemed to be greatly enjoying his hibernation, and not about the town, whose problems could be solved. What she lay awake fretting about now were the vast, irresolvable cosmic dilemmas that had so deeply troubled Kenneth. Nor was she alone in her anxiety. At the office her secretary began quoting statistics about the likelihood of asteroid impacts. The county surveyor brooded over satellite photos that foretold the annihilation of the Amazon rain forests. The panhandler who used to play a banjo and harmonica on the steps of cityhall for loose change now passed around leaflets documenting the history of flying saucers. Children playing hopscotch on the sidewalks introduced quarks and quasars into their rhymes. What kept everyone awake, the mayor realized, was the virus of worry.

WILL YOU STOP THIS IDIOCY, she printed on Kenneth's clipboard. YOU'RE DRIVING US ALL CRAZY.

He would not acknowledge her messages while she was nearby to watch. But if she went away for a spell, upon her return she usually found a reply.

I'M WORKING ON IT, he wrote.

ON WHAT?

THE DREAM WORK.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE? she demanded.

WHO KNOWS? he replied.

HURRY, she pleaded, BEFORE I DO SOMETHING DESPERATE.

Some three nights after this exchange, when the sultriness of August had settled over the town and fatigue had befuddled her reason, Sally found herself terrified by the notion of wormholes in space. If the universe, or even just the Milky Way, were sucked through one of those wormholes, she speculated, reality would be turned inside out. Where would that leave everything she cared about? And what about the possibility of a collision with some galaxy of anti-matter? Mirror images of everything, neutrinos and rhinos, rushing together with a lustful sigh into nothingness. A solar flare might undo things before wormholes or anti-galaxies could work their trick, of course, and nuclear warheads might reverse the evolution of starstuff even sooner.

It was hot in the bedroom, unbearably hot. Mummied in his astronaut's suit, Kenneth seemed to radiate heat. Sally grasped the hem of her nightgown and fluttered it up and down, wafting air across her belly. She could hear the air-conditioner whining ineffectually. After a while she threw off her gown and hung it on the bedpost, then stood for a while at the window, brooding about neutron stars. Outside it must surely be cooler.

When she turned around, Kenneth was floating a foot above the bed. Phantasms of sleeplessness, she thought, rubbing her eyes. But when she touched his booted foot he glided across the bedroom and bumped helmet-first against the glass of the balcony door.

KENNETH, she scribbled on the clipboard that rested on his stomach, THIS HAS GONE FAR ENOUGH. IF YOU LOVE ME, COME OUT OF THAT SUIT.

Only after she had stood trembling for several minutes in the hallway, where the air felt like the hot breath of a bakery, did Kenneth record his answer: IT'S BECAUSE I LOVE YOU THAT I CAN'T COME OUT. BE PATIENT. I'M NEARLY FINISHED.

The helmet thumped against the doorglass, thump thump, like the sound of a basketball on blacktop. Although Sally was nearly suffocating from the heat, she dared not open the door to the balcony, for fear Kenneth would float out into the night. She took a cold shower, did not dry off, walked dripping around the house. In the kitchen she opened the knife drawer and studied the blades. The serrated edges reminded her of zippers, vertebrae, teeth. The bottles in the medicine cabinet, stiff and shiny, made her think of robot soldiers. She bit her arm and felt only a dull pressure. The carpet beneath her bare toes, leading her back down the hallway to the bedroom, felt like sponge. She was striding across the floor of the sea. Kenneth was a diver, encased in a silver suit, his helmet a bubble of air in the deeps. At the entrance to the bedroom she paused. Would Kenneth slip out of his suit when he saw her naked? Would he drown if she slid open one of the zippers and pressed her hand against his dreaming flesh? How was it she kept on breathing here at the bottom of the ocean, here in the vacuum of space, here in their orbiting house?

From the threshold of the bedroom she heard his gloved hand pawing at the latch of the balcony door.

"Kenneth!" Rushing to the door, she arrived in time to see him float out past the balcony railing. The sight of his bootsoles gliding away into the darkness tugged loose the reins of nightmare in her mind.

How she passed the next two hours Sally herself would never be able to recall. Nearly everyone else in town did recall, however, and with exquisite detail, for no public official had ever before done anything half so remarkable.

The mayor ran screaming down the front steps of her newfangled house, as naked as the day she was born. She kept pointing skyward and yelling. No one could understand what she was saying, and everybody was too mesmerized by her appearance to notice for quite a while the silvery, helmeted body floating overhead. Her shapeliness amazed the men, who had always suspected that beneath her severe workaday suits she was an iron maiden. Even the women found themselves captivated by the spectacle of their full-breasted mayor. Such an intelligence in such ample and enticing flesh! Anything was possible, the women reflected. The younger ones considered taking up the study of engineering. The older women pondered the virtues of karate. Many of the sleepless children who had been playing hopscotch and marbles under the streetlights wriggled out of their clothes and ran after the mayor, who was striding like a somnambulist toward the town square, her face uptilted, her mouth open and baying like a hound.

The cinemas were just letting out from their midnight shows, the pharmacies were spilling their drug-seekers onto the sidewalks, the churches were releasing their vigil-keepers, and the square was thronged with people as the mayor rushed onto the courthouse lawn. Forgetting their weeks of restlessness, the townspeople made way for this entranced beauty. Without hesitating she proceeded to the equestrian war memorial and climbed onto the bronze horse in front of the forgotten general. About the horse's metal flanks she clasped the creamy thighs of a goddess. All the onlookers within arm's reach were sorely tempted to stroke her legs. No one knew quite what to do. Call the sheriff? Seize her and carry her wrapped in blankets to the hospital? Clearly the weight of sleeplessness had snapped all the restraining cables in her mind.

While the townspeople crowded about the statue, stunned by her incomprehensible wailing and by the unforeseen glory of her flesh, the mayor kept pointing skyward. At last the onlookers followed her finger and spied the spaceman floating near the tops of the courthouse trees. Many people cried out. Children laughed nervously, glancing at their parents to see what they should make of this apparition. Moonlight glinted from the spaceman's helmet, and from the glass dials encrusting the front of his suit.

Suddenly the mayor stood up, keeping a precarious balance on the horse's back by seizing hold of the general's uplifted saber. She reached skyward, as if imagining in her anguish that she could pluck the astronaut from the air. "Kenneth!" she yelled, her first decipherable word, "don't go!" When she lowered her arm she was clutching in her fist the end of a black thread. Now the onlookers noticed hundreds of threads dangling down from the night sky. At first only the tallest men could grasp them. Then small children, climbing onto the shoulders of older

brothers and sisters, grabbed the gossamer strings. In a moment threads were brushing the cheeks of women, who instinctively seized them and held on tight. Very soon everyone, from babes in arms to oldsters in wheelchairs, was holding onto a sky thread. The crowd could see as the astronaut spun idly around in the moonlight that all their strings led up to him. He lolled and bobbed like a tethered balloon, like a sluggish kite, like a snagged fish.

"Stay, Kenneth, stay!" pleaded the mayor. She teetered on the horse's back. "We'll manage! We'll survive it all! We'll come through!"

At that moment all the sky threads drew taut. The onlookers felt a tug at their clenched fists. For a dizzy instant, while they clung to the astronaut's tethers, their feet lifted clear of the ground. The mayor let out a piercing wail. Then with a barely audible snap all the strings broke at once and the townspeople landed with a jounce. The loose threads drifted down like frail streamers. Overhead the spaceman swung about and began to rise, as if caught in a whirlpool. He dwindled swiftly upward, looking at first like a sleek minnow aglow with moonlight, then he shrank to the size of a needle, a sliver, a spark, and winked out.

The townspeople slumped down right then in rows and heaps on the courthouse lawn, and for the first time in weeks they slept, and dreamed, and scarcely heard the mayor's shrieking. ●



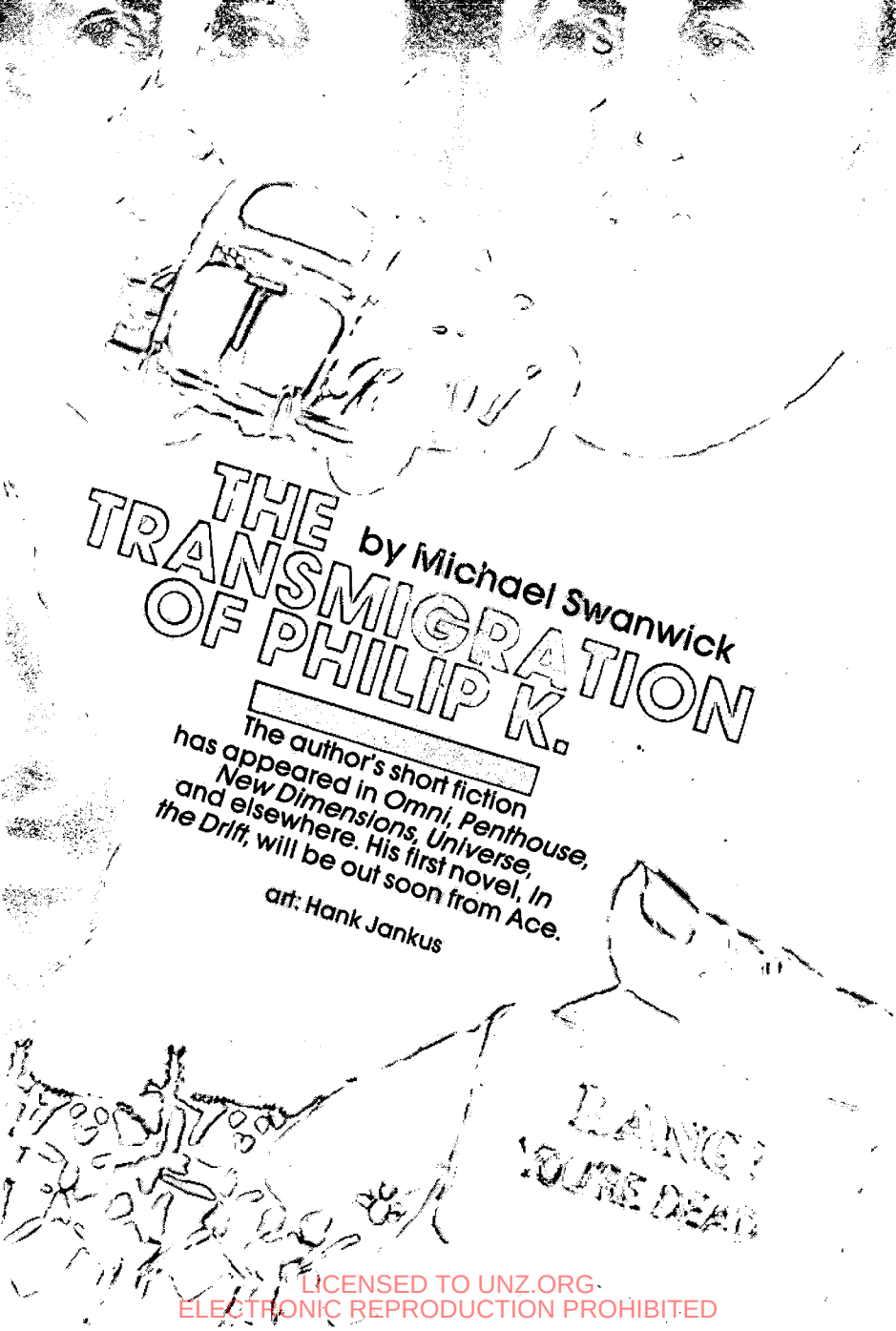
INTO THE WOOD

Let us enter the wood.
Take my hand.
I feel your fear
rise on your palm,
a map beneath my fingers.
Can you decipher
the pulsing code
that beats at my wrist?

I do not need to see
dragons
to know there are
dragons here.
The back of my neck knows,
The skin of my inner thighs.
There, among the alders,
between twin beeches,
the grey-white pilasters
twined with wild grape,
stands a pavillion,
inferior Palladian in style.
Who sleeps on the antique couch?
I hear a thin scraping,
a belly through dead leaves,
a long, hollow goodby,
thin, full of scales,
modal, descending sounds.
In the dark
there will be eyes
thick as starshine,
a galaxy of watchers
beneath the trailing vine.
And trillium,
the red of heart's blood,
spills between rocks
to mark the path.
Do not, for God's sake,
let my hand go.
Do not, for God's sake,
speak.
I know what is here
and what is not,
and if we do not
name it aloud
it will do us no harm.
So the spells go,
so the tales go,
and I must believe it so.

—Jane Yolen





THE TRANSMIGRATION OF PHILIP K.

by Michael Swanwick

The author's short fiction
has appeared in *Omni*, *Penthouse*,
New Dimensions, *Universe*,
and elsewhere. His first novel, *In
the Drift*, will be out soon from Ace.

art: Hank Jankus

RANGE
YOU'RE DEAD

Philip K was buried in the grave that had been waiting for him all his life. It was one half of a twin plot, and in the other half was buried his twin sister, who had died at birth.

Through all his life, she had awaited him with the eerie patience of the dead. Now, as the last shovel of earth was thrown over his coffin, the last prayer faded into air, the last mourner gone back to the city, the circuit was complete. Energy passed between brother and sister.

At last, it could begin.

Whirr-buzz-click.

The robot came walking down the street. A chromed knee peeked regularly from the wrinkled trenchcoat, flashing in the sunlight. Highly polished steel shone above the clumsily tied-up Adidas. Its face was a smooth ovoid, broken only by two telescoping camera lenses where the eyes might be, and a round speaker grill for the mouth. It wore a broken-down slouch hat, pulled low over its camera eyes for further concealment.

From his living room, Sandy Pankopf stared in terror as the thing approached. It nodded as it passed by the milkman, and the milkman in response grinned and touched his cap. This can't be happening, Pankopf thought. Not again. Not for the fifth day in a row.

The robot walked up to his house. Peering from behind the drapes, Pankopf wondered if the device knew he was there. It had never given any sign that it did. But who knew what powers it might have? Infrared or ultraviolet detectors. X-ray vision.

Now Mrs. McMurtry, his next-door neighbor, straightened up from her flower bed, brushing dirt from her hands, turning to pick up the next pansy in the tray alongside her. She saw the robot, and smiled. The robot turned to face her, and must have offered some pleasantries—from where he cowered, Sandy couldn't hear—for she threw her head back and laughed.

Now the robot had reached his front walk. It paused at the mailbox. Using a metal hand as carefully articulated as any of flesh, it rummaged within. It removed a fistful of mail that Pankopf had left for the mailman, and scrutinized it letter by letter, holding each piece up to its camera eyes for a long and careful scanning. At last it returned every piece but one to the box, closed the door, and raised the flag signaling the mailman there was mail within to be picked up.

Then—servomotors humming gently to themselves—it turned and went away, striding down the sidewalk as if it owned the town.

Just before it turned the corner and disappeared from sight, Pankopf's dog, Spot, came bounding up from the back yard. The robot paused to pat the mongrel on the head. Spot lolled out his tongue and wagged his tail.

Whirr-buzz-click.

The grey fog was creeping in again. Just a wisp or two to begin with, coming in through the doorway and seeping under the windowsill, but there would be more soon, Dorff knew. The way things were going.

"I've got Pankopf on the phone," Miss Goodbody said.

"Thank you." Dorff picked up the receiver, and glared into the cathode ray tube. "Pankopf, you putz, why aren't you at work?"

On the screen, Pankopf looked positively green. "I'm running a little late today, boss. I was just heading out the door."

"Well, you'd better," Dorff growled. "Your job is none too secure here. It's hanging by a thread." He hung up and the screen went dead. "Jesus. Did you see the phone he was holding? One of those black jobbies, without any buttons, just—what do you call it?—a dial."

More of the grey fog floated in. Sometimes the entire office seemed to fill up with it. The employees in their cubicles were degenerating now—he could see them through the open door, their flesh turning grey and peeling away from the skull, their clothing rotting on bodies gone suddenly gaunt. They looked like the drawings of ghouls in the old EC comics.

"I don't see why you keep coddling that twerp," Miss Goodbody said. "If it were up to me, I'd have given him the old heave-ho a year ago."

Dorff looked at her. She was changing in some subtle way he couldn't quite put a finger on yet. Sometimes the fog made people mutate into pig-creatures, or tentacular monstrosities. Sometimes it devolved them into pre-human brutes. "That twerp", as you call him," he said coldly, "is all that stands between us and chaos. He may think he's living in 1956, with Eisenhower in the White House and Howdy Doody on the silver screen, but he has a firmer grasp on reality than anyone I know. Do you know how many cancellations his neighborhood has had this year? None. Half of them aren't even fully aware of the problem. They think it's something that only happens in Cambodia or Nebraska or someplace, for Chrissake."

The fog wrapped itself about Miss Goodbody. She leaned forward, a shadowy, secretive shape. Her eyes were two red coals. "You don't need him," she said. "Drop him. Let him twissst in the wind." She leaned closer, and her breath was a cold wind from out of the grave. "Cassst him assside. Cut hisss abdomen open, and let me eat hisss entrails for you."

"That's completely out of line, Miss Goodbody!" Dorff snapped. He gestured to the door. "I believe you have typing to do."

When she left, he sighed and removed his glasses, pinching the bridge of his nose between two fingers. It was all going to Hell, and he only had

Pankopf left. With Philip Kingsley dead, the whole megillah rested on the shoulders of a lone, paranoid little twerp.

There was a rap on the door, and a robot came in. "I retrieved this item as per your instructions, sir," it said, depositing a letter on his desk.

"Good, good." Dorff glanced at the thing—another letter of resignation. He placed it in his desk drawer, along with the others. "We're safe for another day, at least." He glanced up sharply. "You don't suppose he'll have the nerve to quit in person, do you?"

"No, sir," the robot said. "It is my considered opinion that he will not. He is not what you'd call a confident man, and you're something of a father-figure to him. Before he could bring himself to defy you to your face, he'd first have to resolve the inner torments he suffers."

Terrific, thought Dorff. Pankopf saves the world, and I keep him scared and neurotic. That's my job. To make sure he doesn't develop the backbone to throw his rotten little job in my face.

He dismissed the robot. It was bright and gleaming. The fog did not seem to affect mechanicals the way it did humans. Maybe because they were inorganic life, and not subject to the inevitable entropic decay of protoplasm. Or possibly it was because humans felt doubt and pain and guilt, while inorgs did not.

It was certainly something to think about.

But when he opened the desk for another glimpse at the letters, they had already disintegrated to mouldy debris at the bottom of the drawer. Dorff shut the drawer hastily, with a pale hand grown suddenly leprous and thin. The grey fog closed about him.

It was getting harder and harder to hold it all together.

"I sure do miss old Phil," Pankopf said.

"Don't you have any work to do?" Milligan grumbled. But he pushed his chair away from his desk and leaned back, with an Irishman's readiness to talk. Even though he was fifth-generation American or something. "I didn't really know Phil Karlton. He wrote those little jingles for the bubble-gum inserts, like you do, didn't he?"

"Chewsy Rhymes," Pankopf said. "That's what we call them. Chewsy Rhymes for Chewsy People. It's not as easy as it sounds. Dorff has got all these weird theories about what sells bubble-gum cards, and he'll want six disparate words all put into the same limerick. You haven't lived until you've tried to fit 'Chevrolet Cordoba' and 'cirque glacier' into the same couplet."

"Oops." Milligan bent hastily over his work. "Her nibs is coming."

Miss Goodbody strode up to Pankopf, a sheaf of papers in her hand. "You weren't at your desk," she said accusingly. Then, "These will all have to be done over. Mr. Dorff found them unsatisfactory."

Unhappily, Pankopf leafed through the papers. He stopped at one that began *A ferris-wheel addict, Marie* . . . "What's wrong with this one? It scans perfectly."

"It also rhymes Marie with Paris. Mr. Dorff does not want the French pronunciation. He wants Paris to rhyme with ferris."

"But if I do that, the word 'wheel' drops down to the next line and screws up the scansion!"

"That's your problem," Miss Goodbody said coldly. "They're *all* your problem. And I might state confidentially that Mr. Dorff is none too pleased with your work of late. I'd suggest you buckle down. You can be replaced by a rhyming dictionary, you know."

"Cripes," Pankopf muttered as she walked away. Milligan studied her departing posterior with interest.

"How'd you like to take a bite out of that?" he grinned. Then, grabbing his hat, "Come on. She's not going to check up on you for hours. Let's skip across the street for a beer."

Several hours later, they were still drinking. Empty Iron City bottles littered their table. Pankopf glanced out the window. "Sure is foggy out there."

Milligan merely shivered, and hunched down over his stein. As the fog had grown, Bob Milligan had gotten more and more morose and uncommunicative, until now he was sunk in Celtic gloom. It made him dull company; if Pankopf hadn't been half-plastered, he'd have left long ago.

A man stepped in out of the fog. He was tall and thin, and wore a Burberry overcoat with a snap-brim hat. In the dim light, he looked a lot like Humphrey Bogart. The door closed quietly behind him, and he walked toward their table. As he passed by a neon Budweiser sign, his face was briefly illumined in red.

"Phil!" Pankopf cried in astonishment. "Phil Korzinski!"

Milligan's head jerked up. Skin pale, he twisted around in his chair.

"Jesus, Phil, we all thought you were dead," Pankopf said happily. But Korzinski ignored him. He slipped a hand into his trenchcoat and quietly said, "Stand up, Milligan. The day of reckoning is at hand."

With a despairing croak, Milligan lurched to his feet, and tried to flee. His chair clattered to the floor.

Korzinski's hand whipped out, holding a small, white card. He thrust it at Milligan, who fearfully took it with both hands. Slowly, Milligan bent his head to read the card. His eyes opened wide in horror, and a convulsive shudder ran through his body.

He fell dead at Korzinski's feet.

Now Korzinski stepped forward and pressed something into Pankopf's hands—a pair of pills, white, with PK-47 embossed into the surface of

each. Sandy looked up into the eyes of his old friend. There was an odd look in those eyes. Compassion, maybe.

Korzinski smiled gently. "Things are seldom what they seem," he said. Then he turned away, and walked back out into the fog.

Pankopf stared down at the corpse. There was no blood. But the fall had cracked Milligan's skull, and through that crack there gleamed tiny wheatseed lights, and slow-moving silver cogs.

Bob Milligan was a robot.

For a moment Pankopf stood stunned. Then, transferring the PK-47s to his pocket, he bent over and picked up the small white card that Korzinski had used to kill Milligan. It was resting on the robot's chest, printed side down. He turned it over. It read:

BANG

- You're Dead

A pattern was beginning to emerge.

An instant after Dorff's orgasm, Miss Goodbody raised herself from the supine body of her superior, and abruptly announced, "Milligan's dead."

It took Dorff a moment to realize what she was talking about. Then he remembered the telemetry. Even here, in the privacy of his luxury penthouse, Miss Goodbody was wired into the workings of his business empire. "We got bigger things to worry about," he said. "We almost lost Paris today. Not to mention ferris wheels. Milligan is only a robot. He can be repaired and back on the job tomorrow."

"It won't be the same," Miss Goodbody said. She left Dorff on the bed, picked up her bra and snapped it around her body, clasp to the front. Then she twisted it around and slipped her arms into the straps. She shrugged it on, adjusted the fit. "If there's any discontinuity of mental function, the personality dies. The mind that's reawakened might think the same, act the same, have the same memories. But that's no consolation to the personality that died."

"Mere sophistry," Dorff scoffed. "A difference that makes no difference is no difference at all."

"Isn't it?" She stalked toward him, still wearing only the brassiere. "Let's put you in his place. Let's imagine that you've been cloned and that your exact physical double exists, alive but unawakened. Let's further imagine that it is possible to record all your memories and program them into this hypothetical clone of yourself. Suppose then that I strangled you—" She placed her hands around his neck, touching thumb to thumb and index finger to index finger—"and ordered the clone programmed with your memories and awakened. To the rest of the world,

this would be the same person you had always been. But to you—the dead you—it would make a very big difference.”

Dorff did not respond. He could not. After a moment, Miss Goodbody opened her hands, and his dead body slumped down to the bed. She lit a cigarette, but made no move to get dressed.

Shortly, the robots she had summoned earlier entered the room with Dorff's clone on a gurney. They deftly traded clone and corpse, and flash-recorded the memories of the dead industrialist. Miss Goodbody examined the tape, snipped a least fraction off with her long nails, and supervised the programming.

A moment later they were gone. Miss Goodbody snubbed out her cigarette, found her position. A vein in the clone's forehead throbbed. It came alive.

“Milligan is only a robot,” Dorff said. “He can be repaired and back on the job tomorrow.”

Miss Goodbody shrugged. “Don't forget that *I* am a robot too.” She smiled oddly.

A strange, sourceless shiver ran up Dorff's spine. No, he thought. No, you're not a robot. You're something else entirely.

But he was afraid to ask himself what.

Whirr-buzz-click.

I'm almost getting used to this, Pankopf thought, as the robot disappeared around the corner, his latest letter of resignation held fast in its mechanical fist. He unfolded his newspaper, glanced down the front page—something Dulles had said about nuclear brinksmanship, a photo of Ike at the golf course—and the phone rang. Pankopf moved to answer it, then stopped himself.

The hell with it, he thought. It's just Dorff again. I'll leave now and if he asks, I'll say I'd just left when I heard the phone ring. Feeling rather daring, he put the paper down and stepped out the door.

Mrs. McMurtry was at work in her front yard flower bed. “Good morning, Mr. Pankopf,” she said brightly. Then she frowned, and yanked up a tangle of blue and red threads from the ground. “Have you ever seen anything like these? They're all through the soil.” She *tsked*. “And just since this morning, too.” Unaccountably, the thin, wirelike roots made him feel uncomfortable. Pankopf shook his head.

“Oh, and I have this for you.” Mrs. McMurtry pulled an envelope from her gardening apron. “A Mr. Philip Kamin asked me to pass it on to you.”

Hands trembling, he tore open the envelope. The letter inside read, *You'd better wake up soon, Sandy! You're in grave danger. Don't trust Goodbody or Milligan. Dorff is okay, but he's badly misinformed. I'll do*

what I can for you, but ultimately we're all in this alone. Right? I'd advise you to do up those drugs immediately. It was signed Phil.

Phil, he thought. His old dead friend. But Milligan had been his friend too. If Phil really was still on his side, reaching out from beyond the grave to give him a shot of the straight truth, why had he killed Milligan?

He turned the letter over. On the other side was a postscript. It read, *P.S. Oh, wise up, Sandy. Milligan isn't your friend. He and Miss Goodbody are playing good cop/bad cop with you. Don't fall for it. And cheer up—things are bad enough without you mooning about like this.—PK*

Mrs. McMurtry was watching him carefully. "Is something wrong, dear?" she asked in a motherly tone.

"No, no," he said hastily, folding the letter. "Everything's fine." The PK-47's were heavy in his pocket, but he wasn't ready to take them yet.

Phil wants me to cheer up, he thought. He's *dead* and he thinks I'm taking too pessimistic a view of things.

It was a depressing thought.

Dorff had a teleconference first thing that morning. He was seated at the head of the conference table when the telerobots—big, burly inorgs with visor screens in place of their heads—lumbered in and took their seats. The images of their distant managers, forwarded by satellite from their native lands, flickered blue on the screens.

Present today were Señor Velasquez of Argentina, Herr Altemeister from the Deutscherrepublik, and Jerome Hunt of South Africa. Absent was Kommisar Gavronsky, who managed the *two* maintainers in the Soviet Socialist Republics. There were rumors of another maintainer in China, but the Communist bureaucracy there refused to confirm or communicate.

Jerome Hunt kicked off the discussion by clearing his throat, and announcing, "I have more on the parallels between our maintainers and the kabbalistic notion of the seven just men who maintain the world in the sight of God."

A chorus of groans went around the telerobots. Hunt was a thin, starved-looking man with the pinched soul of an academic. Dorff often thought the South African viewed his country's maintainer primarily as an opportunity to deliver an endless series of lectures on phenomenology.

Then again, perhaps he was simply embarrassed that their maintainer—a fat, jovial woman in her early fifties—was black. This might be his way of avoiding dealing with the implications of that fact.

"Go on," Dorff said.

Hunt's telerobot picked up an imaginary bundle of papers, and leafed through them. "If we accept as a working hypothesis that reality is maintained through consensus, i.e., through our *perception* of it, then we

must also accept that it is the job not only of the select few—our maintainers—but of each and every one of us to maintain reality. In much the same way the Medievals held that virtue was the duty of all, no matter that it was displayed in pure form only by the select few. By 'saints', if you will.

"Thus, in relinquishing control to a handful of maintainers, we are experiencing a collective failure of nerve. A wholesale backing away from the responsibility of existence."

As Hunt droned on, Dorff found his attention wandering. He noted that Velasquez's telerobot was already going through his characteristic fidget. It was impossible to say what was actually going on, but it looked like the man was picking up and snapping pencils, one after another. Hundreds of them per session.

"The teleological imperatives are . . ."

Dorff wondered idly if it was possible that Velasquez *was* snapping pencils. Perhaps there was an undersecretary of stationery who kept him supplied with endless boxes of perfectly sharpened number two leadeds.

His train of thought was shattered when the conference room door suddenly slammed open. A new telerobot bulled its way into the room, Kommissar Gavronsky's face flickering on its screen. The other telerobots looked up, annoyed and muttering. But Gavronsky silenced them all with a wave of his metal hand. "Olga is dying!" he announced.

A chorus of protest arose. Impossible, Dorff thought. Olga was young and healthy, even athletic, and she was the most perceptive of the known maintainers. Her eyes were a clear and limpid blue that missed nothing. How could she be dying?

"Soviet medicine is the best in the world," Gavronsky was angrily retorting to some accusation. "It is not a matter of the body. She has lost confidence in herself. A matter of an unfortunate love affair. The people responsible have—"

His telerobot disintegrated into dust.

"So," Jerome Hunt said with gloomy satisfaction. "There are now only six just men left in the world. And seven are needed to keep it from destruction." Grey fog began creeping into the room.

The meeting broke up in disarray.

First thing at work, Milligan came by his desk and with a big grin said, "Some night last night, huh? Have I got a head this morning!"

Pankopf flinched back from the man. He looked different. It wasn't just that he ought to be dead. That wasn't his old, roguish, devil-may-care Irish grin. It was a mean grin now, and malice sparkled in his eyes.

"I think I need an aspirin," Pankopf said. He opened his desk drawer

and began searching through it, deliberately keeping his eyes averted from Milligan's.

"Have you ever noticed," Milligan said casually, "how if you say a common everyday word—aspirin, for example—often enough it loses all meaning? You think aspirin, and you can't picture it. It's just a funny combination of syllables. Aspirin."

"No, I never did," Pankopf said. But he did now. He kept searching for and not finding the pills. Aspirins.

"Or pens," Milligan said. "Or pencils, for that matter. Paper. Say it over a few times to yourself. Paper. What does it mean? Nothing. How could it mean anything? Paper."

The drawer was strangely empty now, and growing emptier as Milligan droned on and on, naming things that Pankopf seemed to immediately forget. And yet, in spite of the fact the drawer contained so little, Pankopf was still unable to find the—whatever it was he was looking for. It must not be in the drawer. Numbly, as if he were reaching through a haze of pain, he began searching through his pockets.

"Park benches," Milligan said. "Pears, peacocks and piggy-banks. All meaningless. Parachutes."

There was something in his shirt pocket. Pankopf took it out and unfolded it, hoping against hope that the . . . whatever, was in there.

It was a letter, the one he had gotten from Philip Korman. It seemed to be made of metal foil now, rather than of that stuff he couldn't seem to put a name to but that letters were normally written on. But by turning it side to side, he could read the embossed letters as light flashed silver on them: *For the love of God, Sandy! Assert yourself!—K*

"For that matter, what in the world is a Pankopf?" Milligan said, his grin growing wider and more malicious by the second. "Pan-kopf. Say it over to yourself a few times slowly. Pan—"

Pankopf broke and ran.

The grey mists parted and Dorff came to. For a moment he lay motionless, eyes closed. I'm in a hospital, he thought. Something is seriously wrong. The last thing he remembered, he was in his penthouse with Miss Goodbody. Discussing the nature of identity. Then, without the least sense of transition—here. He hoped he wasn't dying.

He opened his eyes, and found himself staring into his own face.

"Come on, Dorff, get up," Dorff said, hauling himself roughly to his feet. "No time to lollygag about."

Dorff stared about, blinking. He was in a vast room with row upon row of cryogenic clone tanks. A good half of them were already open. Not far away, a cluster of some twenty Dorffs talked quietly to themselves. Here and there in the room he walked alone, thinking.

"What's going on?" he asked.

"Oh, God, I don't think I can stomach going through the explanations one more time." Dorff made a disgusted face, then thrust a bundle of clothing into his arms. "Get dressed. We've got to get moving. Phil tipped me off to what's happening—"

"Phil? You mean Phil Kavanaugh? But he's dead."

"That's the one," Dorff said. "Snap it up, will you? We're in trouble. Real bad trouble. Pankopf's ready to break."

The world was falling apart. Probably this was nothing new, but Pankopf was finally coming to accept it now. So he was startled, but not really surprised when the cab he got into lifted straight up into the air, angled forward, and soared west.

"Where to, Mac?" The cabbie threw a chromed elbow over the back of the front seat and twisted around to face him. Another robot.

It was too much. Pankopf no longer cared. "Mount Pleasant Avenue," he said, and the robot banked his crate, heading for the suburbs. They drove in silence, the land below flat and misty blue, while Pankopf tried to collect his thoughts.

At last he asked, "What does the phrase 'Things are seldom what they seem' mean to you?"

"It's from Gilbert and Sullivan's *H.M.S. Pinafore*, sir," the robot said politely. "The next line is 'Skim milk masquerades as cream.'"

"My problem is I don't know who to trust," Pankopf said. "I mean everybody claims to be my friend, but all I have to go on is appearances. I had hoped that phrase might give me a clue. Obviously, I was wrong."

"On the contrary, sir. The difference between skim milk and cream is not great, more a matter of degree than of kind. I would say that in the same way the difference between perception and reality is most likely slight. One might not trust appearances, but in the absence of reliable information to the contrary, one must act *as if* surface appearances were reliable."

"Maybe you're right," Pankopf said thoughtfully.

The hack dropped him off before his house, and lifted away. Ignoring Mrs. McMurtry's cheery wave, Pankopf hurried down the walk. He quickly stepped inside, turned and locked the door behind himself. For the first time in ages, he felt safe.

"Got you!" Miss Goodbody said with satisfaction.

"I feel silly," Dorff said.

"Shut up!" the Dorff-in-command snapped. "Straighten those ranks!" They were marching up Mount Pleasant Avenue in locked-step formation, hundreds of Dorffs all dressed in identical jumpsuits. The grey fog

parted for them in front, and closed in behind them as they passed. Inside the mists, large shadowy shapes moved. A chittering insect noise sounded. Dorff was not the only one to shudder.

But even facing enemies as horrific as these, this kind of regimentation is wrong, Dorff thought. You shouldn't be forced to conform, to be just like everyone else in the crowd. Not even if everyone else in the crowd was you, too.

But even as Dorff advanced in even columns, the neatly-mowed lawns before them began to stir. Black holes appeared in the green, small at first, but growing larger.

"Prepare for combat!" Lieutenant Dorffs broke him into squadrons.

With what? Dorff wondered suddenly. None of him had been issued weapons.

Things came burrowing up out of the ground.

"Kumquat," Milligan said. He held the fruit out in his palm, and frowned when it didn't disappear. "He's not cooperating," he complained.

Miss Goodbody took a sip of her tea, looked down at Pankopf, tied to his own easy chair. "Tepid," she said. Very deliberately she turned the cup over, pouring the lukewarm tea into Pankopf's lap. "He has nice eyes. Heat up a few butter knives on the kitchen range."

Just then there was a knock at the door. It opened a crack, and Mrs. McMurtry peeked in.

"Yoo hoo!" she cried, holding a rolled-up newspaper before her. "Is Mr. Pankopf here? His dog just dropped his paper on my stoop." She peered about, saw him tied to his chair. "Oh, there you are!"

"Grab her!" Miss Goodbody screamed.

She and Milligan had just grabbed the old woman's arms when Dorff stepped out from his hiding place just outside the door, automatic weapon in hand. He was wearing a beret set at a jaunty angle on his head. "Didn't think any of me would make it through, did you?" he grinned. He herded the two abductors to the back of the room, while Mrs. McMurtry untied Pankopf. "You okay, Sandy?"

"I suppose so. What's going on?"

Dorff looked to Mrs. McMurtry, who nodded curtly. "Reality is falling apart," he said. "The scientists think that some of the weapons used in World War VII have permanently damaged the fabric of reality. People and places have been simply winking out of existence. Or else they change into . . . something else.

"But there are little islands of sanity here and there, places where people don't disappear or change. We investigated, and found that a few scattered individuals were maintaining reality about them. You're one of them, Sandy. Even if you do think you're living a hundred years in

the past. That's why we moved Mrs. McMurtry in next door to you. As president of the United States, her welfare is second only to yours."

Jesus, Pankopf thought. A woman president.

"Cover me while I tie these two up," Mrs. McMurtry ordered Dorff. Ignored, Pankopf glanced down at the newspaper the president had brought with her. There was a picture of Phil on the front page. Wonderingly, he picked it up, and began reading the article beneath the photo:

CAMDEN (UPI)—Philip Kirby today expressed doubt that Sanford Pankopf would ever see through to the true nature of reality. "Sandy's a good guy," he told reporters, "but he's got to learn to think for himself. Right now it looks like he's going to buy Dorff's version of things. And that would be a big mistake." Pankopf was recently rescued from two assailants by Lemuel Dorff and President Helen McMurtry. In a daring daytime raid—

Pankopf put down the paper. Even Phil's given up on me, he thought. I guess I've really made a mess of things. He didn't for an instant think that he'd worked through to the truth yet. It was like an onion, where you peel off layer after layer until you're left with—what? Maybe nothing. But he still had the duty to search for that ultimate center.

He dug out the PK-47s and looked at the small, white pharmaceuticals. Maybe they'd burn out his brain, and leave him a helpless, drooling addict for the rest of his life. But it was a risk he had to take. One after the other, he popped the pills, without water. For an instant his head swam dizzily. Then he was left feeling calm and lucid. The air seemed preternaturally clear. And he knew what he had to do.

"Milligan," he said suddenly, "what are you really? Are you a robot or what?"

The bound man twisted his head away from Pankopf's stare. But Pankopf kept looking anyway, not blinking, willing himself to see. Milligan shimmered. His shape went vague, then melted, shifting and reforming at random, until at last he stabilized into a gigantic insect.

It was a beetle. It stood taller than Pankopf did, and its hard carapace was shiny black. Milligan shifted slightly, and iridescent rainbows danced over his shell. He was beautiful, in the way that a bulgy, black landcar can be beautiful. "Milligan?" Pankopf said hesitantly. The creature clacked its pincers. Beyond it, Miss Goodbody smiled scornfully.

Dorff backed away from the beetle. The President followed, not as quickly, a look of shrewd surmise on her face.

"And you?" Pankopf demanded of Miss Goodbody. "What do you really look like?" As if by magic, she too turned into an insect.

"My God, Pankopf!" Dorff cried. "What are you doing?"

"Something I have to. To retain my self-respect." He looked directly at Dorff. His boss. "What are you really like?"

Dorff froze. His eyes closed, and his lips turned pale. Whiteness spread, like rimefrost, across his face. At his elbow, President McMurtry was also struck motionless, her skin the blue-white hue of a corpse.

Don't stop there, Pankopf thought through his horror and nausea. There's more to go. He gazed around the comfortably furnished room and through the window at the green lawns outside, the flowerbeds, the tidy little houses. The sky above, the clouds, and the earth below.

He addressed them all: "The masquerade's over. Show yourselves!"

"Bravo," Phil said. "I was beginning to have my doubts, but you came through with flying colors."

Slowly Pankopf lifted his head from the mass of blue and red wires nested about him. He looked at the paper walls, the endless line of occupied therapy couches. "Where am I?" he asked. But already he remembered some of it.

The couches came from the colonizing starship *Rasputin*. Of which he was the astrogator. And Phil—Phil and the woman at his elbow, his twin sister, were the co-captains.

A gigantic black beetle wearing a nurse's cap scuttled up and thrust a thermometer in his mouth. It took his wrist in its pincers. "No fever," it declared. "His pulse is a little fast."

"I'm not surprised," Phil said. He and his sister eased Pankopf to his feet. "We're on New Camden. Do you remember landing on this planet?"

"No—I . . . yes. There was intelligent life here already. Big, black insects." Pankopf shook his head. He felt muzzy.

"That's fine. What else can you remember?"

"We were . . . were going to colonize New Camden. The probes said it would sustain life. But the . . . insects were here already."

"They have a highly-developed civilization," Phil said. "One we can be jealous of. And their city-nests cover all the continents. There isn't any land left unspoken for. Fortunately, they offered us a place within their society. We can share their nests as equals, but we have to live among them. Do you remember that?"

Pankopf shuddered. "Yes," he said at last. "I remember. And I remember that I . . . couldn't take it."

"A lot of us couldn't take it. I was one, you were another. That's why we had to work through the trauma with the therapy couches."

Pankopf looked at the tangle of wires about him, remembered the dreams. "You were healing me." Working through trauma fantasies was a long and involved process, even with tools like the couches. There was

still a headset dangling from the couch. "You were helping guide me back to sanity."

"To acceptance of your world," the co-captain said. "Yes. I did that. With a little help from our fellow citizens." He glanced significantly at the beetles scurrying about the ward. Others wore headsets and sat motionless by the couches.

"Miss Goodbody?" Pankopf suspected, though with a layman's ignorance, that her behavior had not been all that one might desire of a therapist.

"She's a patriot." Phil looked embarrassed. "Not everybody welcomes us on New Camden. There's a small, militant group that doesn't want their racial purity tainted by our presence. Usually we manage to screen them out."

Pankopf took a deep breath. "What now? Do I just go live among the beetles?" He found that the idea no longer troubled him. He must be healed.

"That too," Phil said. "But I need your help if you'll give it. We're desperately short of guides, and there are still a lot of others left in the therapy couches. Dorff for one. He's coming along nicely, but he still needs help." Then he smiled, and gestured toward a freshly-made hospital bed. Pankopf sat down on it. He felt physically drained. "But that's for later. Right now, I just want you to rest. We'll talk about the future afterward." He winked reassuringly, and strolled away.

Pankopf was about to lie down when he noticed the small white card on the pillow. It had printing on it: *Don't believe them, Sandy. They're just blinding you with science. Keep up the search for the truth.* It was signed *Philip K.*

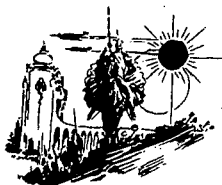
Jesus, Pankopf thought. It never ends.

A metal hand reached over his shoulder and took the card. He whirled around and, dumbfounded, saw a robot striding away, down the corridor. It was dressed in a baggy old overcoat and a pulled-down slouch hat. A pair of Adidas were tied up at its chromed ankles.

Just before it disappeared from sight, it tipped its hat to a gigantic beetle-nurse. The insect curtsied back.

Whirr-buzz-click. ●

"This was just the beginning." —From *Ubik*, by Philip K. Dick



SAILING TO BYZANTIUM

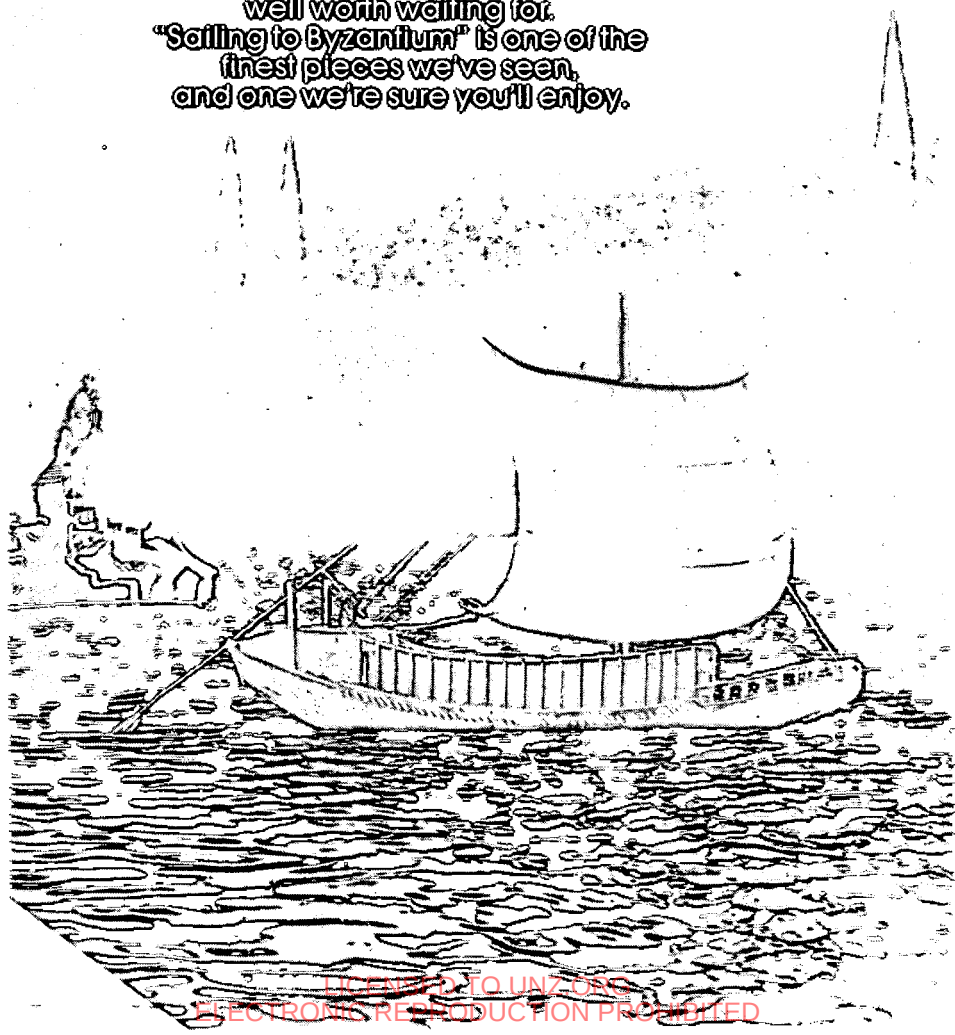


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Robert Silverberg

crit: J.K. Potter

It's been some time since
we've published a story
by Robert Silverberg, but the story
that follows has truly been
well worth waiting for.
"Sailing to Byzantium" is one of the
finest pieces we've seen,
and one we're sure you'll enjoy.



At dawn he arose and stepped out onto the patio for his first look at Alexandria, the one city he had not yet seen. That year the five cities were Chang-an, Asgard, New Chicago, Timbuctoo, Alexandria: the usual mix of eras, cultures, realities. He and Gioia, making the long flight from Asgard in the distant north the night before, had arrived late, well after sundown, and had gone straight to bed. Now, by the gentle apricot-hued morning light, the fierce spires and battlements of Asgard seemed merely something he had dreamed.

The rumor was that Asgard's moment was finished, anyway. In a little while, he had heard, they were going to tear it down and replace it, elsewhere, with Mohenjo-daro. Though there were never more than five cities, they changed constantly. He could remember a time when they had had Rome of the Caesars instead of Chang-an, and Rio de Janeiro rather than Alexandria. These people saw no point in keeping anything very long.

It was not easy for him to adjust to the sultry intensity of Alexandria after the frozen splendors of Asgard. The wind, coming off the water, was brisk and torrid both at once. Soft turquoise wavelets lapped at the jetties. Strong presences assailed his senses: the hot heavy sky, the stinging scent of the red lowland sand borne on the breeze, the sullen swampy aroma of the nearby sea. Everything trembled and glimmered in the early light. Their hotel was beautifully situated, high on the northern slope of the huge artificial mound known as the Paneium that was sacred to the goat-footed god. From here they had a total view of the city: the wide noble boulevards, the soaring obelisks and monuments, the palace of Hadrian just below the hill, the stately and awesome Library, the temple of Poseidon, the teeming marketplace, the royal lodge that Mark Antony had built after his defeat at Actium. And of course the Lighthouse, the wondrous many-windowed Lighthouse, the seventh wonder of the world, that immense pile of marble and limestone and reddish-purple Aswan granite rising in majesty at the end of its mile-long causeway. Black smoke from the beacon-fire at its summit curled lazily into the sky. The city was awakening. Some temporaries in short white kilts appeared and began to trim the dense dark hedges that bordered the great public buildings. A few citizens wearing loose robes of vaguely Grecian style were strolling in the streets.

There were ghosts and chimeras and phantasies everywhere about. Two slim elegant centaurs, a male and a female, grazed on the hillside. A burly thick-thighed swordsman appeared on the porch of the temple of Poseidon holding a Gorgon's severed head; he waved it in a wide arc, grinning broadly. In the street below the hotel gate three small pink sphinxes, no bigger than housecats, stretched and yawned and began to prowl the curbside. A larger one, lion-sized, watched warily from an

alleyway: their mother, surely. Even at this distance he could hear her loud purring.

Shading his eyes, he peered far out past the Lighthouse and across the water. He hoped to see the dim shores of Crete or Cyprus to the north, or perhaps the great dark curve of Anatolia. *Carry me toward that great Byzantium*, he thought. *Where all is ancient, singing at the oars.* But he beheld only the endless empty sea, sun-bright and blinding though the morning was just beginning. Nothing was ever where he expected it to be. The continents did not seem to be in their proper places any longer. Gioia, taking him aloft long ago in her little flutterflitter, had shown him that. The tip of South America was canted far out into the Pacific; Africa was weirdly foreshortened; a broad tongue of ocean separated Europe and Asia. Australia did not appear to exist at all. Perhaps they had dug it up and used it for other things. There was no trace of the world he once had known. This was the fiftieth century. "The fiftieth century after *what?*" he had asked several times, but no one seemed to know, or else they did not care to say.

"Is Alexandria very beautiful?" Gioia called from within.

"Come out and see."

Naked and sleepy-looking, she padded out onto the white-tiled patio and nestled up beside him. She fit neatly under his arm. "Oh, yes, yes!" she said softly. "So very beautiful, isn't it? Look, there, the palaces, the Library, the Lighthouse! Where will we go first? The Lighthouse, I think. Yes? And then the marketplace—I want to see the Egyptian magicians—and the stadium, the races—will they be having races today, do you think? Oh, Charles, I want to see everything!"

"Everything? All on the first day?"

"All on the first day, yes," she said. "Everything."

"But we have plenty of time, Gioia."

"Do we?"

He smiled and drew her tight against his side.

"Time enough," he said gently.

He loved her for her impatience, for her bright bubbling eagerness. Gioia was not much like the rest in that regard, though she seemed identical in all other ways. She was short, supple, slender, dark-eyed, olive-skinned, narrow-hipped, with wide shoulders and flat muscles. They were all like that, each one indistinguishable from the rest, like a horde of millions of brothers and sisters—a world of small, lithe, child-like Mediterraneans, built for juggling, for bull-dancing, for sweet white wine at midday and rough red wine at night. They had the same slim bodies, the same broad mouths, the same great glossy eyes. He had never seen anyone who appeared to be younger than twelve or older than twenty. Gioia was somehow a little different, although he did not quite

know how; but he knew that it was for that imperceptible but significant difference that he loved her. And probably that was why she loved him also.

He let his gaze drift from west to east, from the Gate of the Moon down broad Canopus Street and out to the harbor, and off to the tomb of Cleopatra at the tip of long slender Cape Lochias. Everything was here and all of it perfect, the obelisks, the statues and marble colonnades, the courtyards and shrines and groves, great Alexander himself in his coffin of crystal and gold: a splendid gleaming pagan city. But there were oddities—an unmistakable mosque near the public gardens, and what seemed to be a Christian church not far from the Library. And those ships in the harbor, with all those red sails and bristling masts—surely they were medieval, and late medieval at that. He had seen such anachronisms in other places before. Doubtless these people found them amusing. Life was a game for them. They played at it unceasingly. Rome, Alexandria, Timbuctoo—why not? Create an Asgard of translucent bridges and shimmering ice-girt palaces, then grow weary of it and take it away? Replace it with Mohenjo-daro? Why not? It seemed to him a great pity to destroy those lofty Nordic feasting-halls for the sake of building a squat, brutal, sun-baked city of brown brick; but these people did not look at things the way he did. Their cities were only temporary. Someone in Asgard had said that Timbuctoo would be the next to go, with Byzantium rising in its place. Well, why not? Why not? They could have anything they liked. This was the fiftieth century, after all. The only rule was that there could be no more than five cities at once. "Limits," Gioia had informed him solemnly when they first began to travel together, "are very important." But she did not know why, or did not care to say.

He stared out once more toward the sea.

He imagined a newborn city congealing suddenly out of mists, far across the water: shining towers, great domed palaces, golden mosaics. That would be no great effort for them. They could just summon it forth whole out of time, the Emperor on his throne and the Emperor's drunken soldiery roistering in the streets, the brazen clangor of the cathedral gong rolling through the Grand Bazaar, dolphins leaping beyond the shoreside pavilions. Why not? They had Timbuctoo. They had Alexandria. Do you crave Constantinople? Then behold Constantinople! Or Avalon, or Lyonesse, or Atlantis. They could have anything they liked. It is pure Schopenhauer here: the world as will and imagination. Yes! These slender dark-eyed people journeying tirelessly from miracle to miracle. Why not Byzantium next? Yes! Why not? *That is no country for old men*, he thought. *The young in one another's arms, the birds in the trees*—yes! Yes! Anything they liked. They even had him. Suddenly he

felt frightened. Questions he had not asked for a long time burst through into his consciousness. *Who am I? Why am I here? Who is this woman beside me?*

"You're so quiet all of a sudden, Charles," said Gioia, who could not abide silence for very long. "Will you talk to me? I want you to talk to me. Tell me what you're looking for out there."

He shrugged. "Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Nothing in particular."

"I could see you seeing something."

"Byzantium," he said. "I was imagining that I could look straight across the water to Byzantium. I was trying to get a glimpse of the walls of Constantinople."

"Oh, but you wouldn't be able to see as far as that from here. Not really."

"I know."

"And anyway Byzantium doesn't exist."

"Not yet. But it will. Its time comes later on."

"Does it?" she said. "Do you know that for a fact?"

"On good authority. I heard it in Asgard," he told her. "But even if I hadn't, Byzantium would be inevitable, don't you think? Its time would have to come. How could we not do Byzantium, Gioia? We certainly will do Byzantium, sooner or later. I know we will. It's only a matter of time. And we have all the time in the world."

A shadow crossed her face. "Do we? Do we?"

He knew very little about himself, but he knew that he was not one of them. That he knew. He knew that his name was Charles Phillips and that before he had come to live among these people he had lived in the year 1984, when there had been such things as computers and television sets and baseball and jet planes, and the world was full of cities, not merely five but thousands of them, New York and London and Johannesburg and Paris and Liverpool and Bangkok and San Francisco and Buenos Aires and a multitude of others, all at the same time. There had been four and-a-half billion people in the world then; now he doubted that there were as many as four and a half million. Nearly everything had changed beyond comprehension. The moon still seemed the same, and the sun; but at night he searched in vain for familiar constellations. He had no idea how they had brought him from then to now, or why. It did no good to ask. No one had any answers for him; no one so much as appeared to understand what it was that he was trying to learn. After a time he had stopped asking; after a time he had almost entirely ceased wanting to know.

He and Gioia were climbing the Lighthouse. She scampered ahead, in a hurry as always, and he came along behind her in his more stolid fashion. Scores of other tourists, mostly in groups of two or three, were making their way up the wide flagstone ramps, laughing, calling to one another. Some of them, seeing him, stopped a moment, stared, pointed. He was used to that. He was so much taller than any of them; he was plainly not one of them. When they pointed at him he smiled. Sometimes he nodded a little acknowledgment.

He could not find much of interest in the lowest level, a massive square structure two hundred feet high built of huge marble blocks: within its cool musty arcades were hundreds of small dark rooms, the offices of the Lighthouse's keepers and mechanics, the barracks of the garrison, the stables for the three hundred donkeys that carried the fuel to the lantern far above. None of that appeared inviting to him. He forged onward without halting until he emerged on the balcony that led to the next level. Here the Lighthouse grew narrower and became octagonal: its face, granite now and handsomely fluted, rose in a stunning sweep above him.

Gioia was waiting for him there. "This is for you," she said, holding out a nugget of meat on a wooden skewer. "Roast lamb. Absolutely delicious. I had one while I was waiting for you." She gave him a cup of some cool green sherbet also, and darted off to buy a pomegranate. Dozens of temporaries were roaming the balcony, selling refreshments of all kinds.

He nibbled at the meat. It was charred outside, nicely pink and moist within. While he ate, one of the temporaries came up to him and peered blandly into his face. It was a stocky swarthy male wearing nothing but a strip of red and yellow cloth about its waist. "I sell meat," it said. "Very fine roast lamb, only five drachmas."

Phillips indicated the piece he was eating. "I already have some," he said.

"It is excellent meat, very tender. It has been soaked for three days in the juices of—"

"Please," Phillips said. "I don't want to buy any meat. Do you mind moving along?"

The temporaries had confused and baffled him at first, and there was still much about them that was unclear to him. They were not machines—they looked like creatures of flesh and blood—but they did not seem to be human beings, either, and no one treated them as if they were. He supposed they were artificial constructs, products of a technology so consummate that it was invisible. Some appeared to be more intelligent than others, but all of them behaved as if they had no more autonomy than characters in a play, which was essentially what they were. There were untold numbers of them in each of the five cities,

playing all manner of roles: shepherds and swineherds, street-sweepers, merchants, boatmen, vendors of grilled meats and cool drinks, hagglers in the marketplace, schoolchildren, charioteers, policemen, grooms, gladiators, monks, artisans, whores and cutpurses, sailors—whatever was needed to sustain the illusion of a thriving, populous urban center. The dark-eyed people, Gioia's people, never performed work. There were not enough of them to keep a city's functions going, and in any case they were strictly tourists, wandering with the wind, moving from city to city as the whim took them, Chang-an to New Chicago, New Chicago to Timbuctoo, Timbuctoo to Asgard, Asgard to Alexandria, onward, ever onward.

The temporary would not leave him alone. Phillips walked away and it followed him, cornering him against the balcony wall. When Gioia returned a few minutes later, lips prettily stained with pomegranate juice, the temporary was still hovering about him, trying with lunatic persistence to sell him a skewer of lamb. It stood much too close to him, almost nose to nose, great sad cowlike eyes peering intently into his as it extolled with mournful mooring urgency the quality of its wares. It seemed to him that he had had trouble like this with temporaries on one or two earlier occasions. Gioia touched the creature's elbow lightly and said, in a short sharp tone Phillips had never heard her use before, "He isn't interested. Get away from him." It went at once. To Phillips she said, "You have to be firm with them."

"I was trying. It wouldn't listen to me."

"You ordered it to go away, and it refused?"

"I asked it to go away. Politely. Too politely, maybe."

"Even so," she said. "It should have obeyed a human, regardless."

"Maybe it didn't think I was human," Phillips suggested. "Because of the way I look. My height, the color of my eyes. It might have thought I was some kind of temporary myself."

"No," Gioia said, frowning. "A temporary won't solicit another temporary. But it won't ever disobey a citizen, either. There's a very clear boundary. There isn't ever any confusion. I can't understand why it went on bothering you." He was surprised at how troubled she seemed: far more so, he thought, than the incident warranted. A stupid device, perhaps miscalibrated in some way, overenthusiastically pushing its wares—what of it? What of it? Gioia, after a moment, appeared to come to the same conclusion. Shrugging, she said, "It's defective, I suppose. Probably such things are more common than we suspect, don't you think?" There was something forced about her tone that bothered him. She smiled and handed him her pomegranate. "Here. Have a bite, Charles. It's wonderfully sweet. They used to be extinct, you know. Shall we go on upward?"

The octagonal midsection of the Lighthouse must have been several hundred feet in height, a grim claustrophobic tube almost entirely filled by the two broad spiraling ramps that wound around the huge building's central well. The ascent was slow: a donkey team was a little way ahead of them on the ramp, plodding along laden with bundles of kindling for the lantern. But at last, just as Phillips was growing winded and dizzy, he and Gioia came out onto the second balcony, the one marking the transition between the octagonal section and the Lighthouse's uppermost storey, which was cylindrical and very slender.

She leaned far out over the balustrade. "Oh, Charles, look at the view! Look at it!"

It was amazing. From one side they could see the entire city, and swampy Lake Mareotis and the dusty Egyptian plain beyond it, and from the other they peered far out into the gray and choppy Mediterranean. He gestured toward the innumerable reefs and shallows that infested the waters leading to the harbor entrance. "No wonder they needed a lighthouse here," he said. "Without some kind of gigantic landmark they'd never have found their way in from the open sea."

A blast of sound, a ferocious snort, erupted just above him. He looked up, startled. Immense statues of trumpet-wielding Tritons jutted from the corners of the Lighthouse at this level; that great blurring sound had come from the nearest of them. A signal, he thought. A warning to the ships negotiating that troubled passage. The sound was produced by some kind of steam-powered mechanism, he realized, operated by teams of sweating temporaries clustered about bonfires at the base of each Triton.

Once again he found himself swept by admiration for the clever way these people carried out their reproductions of antiquity. Or *were* they reproductions, he wondered? He still did not understand how they brought their cities into being. For all he knew, this place was the authentic Alexandria itself, pulled forward out of its proper time just as he himself had been. Perhaps this was the true and original Lighthouse, and not a copy. He had no idea which was the case, nor which would be the greater miracle.

"How do we get to the top?" Gioia asked.

"Over there, I think. That doorway."

The spiraling donkey-ramps ended here. The loads of lantern fuel went higher via a dumb-waiter in the central shaft. Visitors continued by way of a cramped staircase, so narrow at its upper end that it was impossible to turn around while climbing. Gioia, tireless, sprinted ahead. He clung to the rail and labored up and up, keeping count of the tiny window-slits to ease the boredom of the ascent. The count was nearing a hundred when finally he stumbled into the vestibule of the beacon chamber. A

dozen or so visitors were crowded into it. Gioia was at the far side, by the wall that was open to the sea.

It seemed to him he could feel the building swaying in the winds, up here. How high were they? Five hundred feet, six hundred, seven? The beacon chamber was tall and narrow, divided by a catwalk into upper and lower sections. Down below, relays of temporaries carried wood from the dumb-waiter and tossed it on the blazing fire. He felt its intense heat from where he stood, at the rim of the platform on which the giant mirror of polished metal was hung. Tongues of flame leaped upward and danced before the mirror, which hurled its dazzling beam far out to sea. Smoke rose through a vent. At the very top was a colossal statue of Poseidon, austere, ferocious, looming above the lantern.

Gioia sidled along the catwalk until she was at his side. "The guide was talking before you came," she said, pointing. "Do you see that place over there, under the mirror? Someone standing there and looking into the mirror gets a view of ships at sea that can't be seen from here by the naked eye. The mirror magnifies things."

"Do you believe that?"

She nodded toward the guide. "It said so. And it also told us that if you look in a certain way, you can see right across the water into the city of Constantinople."

She is like a child, he thought. They all are. He said, "You told me yourself this very morning that it isn't possible to see that far. Besides, Constantinople doesn't exist right now."

"It will," she replied. "You said that to me, this very morning. And when it does, it'll be reflected in the Lighthouse mirror. That's the truth. I'm absolutely certain of it." She swung about abruptly toward the entrance of the beacon chamber. "Oh, look, Charles! Here come Nissandra and Aramayne! And there's Hawk! There's Stengard!" Gioia laughed and waved and called out names. "Oh, everyone's here! *Everyone!*"

They came jostling into the room, so many newcomers that some of those who had been there were forced to scramble down the steps on the far side. Gioia moved among them, hugging, kissing. Phillips could scarcely tell one from another—it was hard for him even to tell which were the men and which the women, dressed as they all were in the same sort of loose robes—but he recognized some of the names. These were her special friends, her set, with whom she had journeyed from city to city on an endless round of gaiety in the old days before he had come into her life. He had met a few of them before, in Asgard, in Rio, in Rome. The beacon-chamber guide, a squat wide-shouldered old temporary wearing a laurel wreath on its bald head, reappeared and began its potted speech, but no one listened to it; they were all too busy greeting one another, embracing, giggling. Some of them edged their way over

to Phillips and reached up, standing on tiptoes, to touch their fingertips to his cheek in that odd hello of theirs. "Charles," they said gravely, making two syllables out of the name, as these people often did. "So good to see you again. Such a pleasure. You and Gioia—such a handsome couple. So well suited to each other."

Was that so? He supposed it was.

The chamber hummed with chatter. The guide could not be heard at all. Stengard and Nissandra had visited New Chicago for the water-dancing—Aramayne bore tales of a feast in Chang-an that had gone on for *days*—Hawk and Hekna had been to Timbuctoo to see the arrival of the salt caravan, and were going back there soon—a final party soon to celebrate the end of Asgard that absolutely should not be missed—the plans for the new city, Mohenjo-daro—we have reservations for the opening, we wouldn't pass it up for anything—and, yes, they were definitely going to do Constantinople after that, the planners were already deep into their Byzantium research—so good to see you, you look so beautiful all the time—have you been to the Library yet? The zoo? To the temple of Serapis?—

To Phillips they said, "What do you think of our Alexandria, Charles? Of course you must have known it well in your day. Does it look the way you remember it?" They were always asking things like that. They did not seem to comprehend that the Alexandria of the Lighthouse and the Library was long lost and legendary by his time. To them, he suspected, all the places they had brought back into existence were more or less contemporary. Rome of the Caesars, Alexandria of the Ptolemies, Venice of the Doges, Chang-an of the T'angs, Asgard of the Aesir, none any less real than the next nor any less unreal, each one simply a facet of the distant past, the fantastic immemorial past, a plum plucked from that dark backward and abysm of time. They had no contexts for separating one era from another. To them all the past was one borderless timeless realm. Why then should he not have seen the Lighthouse before, he who had leaped into this era from the New York of 1984? He had never been able to explain it to them. Julius Caesar and Hannibal, Helen of Troy and Charlemagne, Rome of the gladiators and New York of the Yankees and Mets, Gilgamesh and Tristan and Othello and Robin Hood and George Washington and Queen Victoria—to them, all equally real and unreal, none of them any more than bright figures moving about on a painted canvas. The past, the past, the elusive and fluid past—to them it was a single place of infinite accessibility and infinite connectivity. Of course they would think he had seen the Lighthouse before. He knew better than to try again to explain things. "No," he said simply. "This is my first time in Alexandria."

* * *

They stayed there all winter long, and possibly some of the spring. Alexandria was not a place where one was sharply aware of the change of seasons, nor did the passage of time itself make itself very evident when one was living one's entire life as a tourist.

During the day there was always something new to see. The zoological garden, for instance: a wondrous park, miraculously green and lush in this hot dry climate, where astounding animals roamed in enclosures so generous that they did not seem like enclosures at all. Here were camels, rhinoceroses, gazelles, ostriches, lions, wild asses; and here too, casually adjacent to those familiar African beasts, were hippogriffs, unicorns, basilisks, and fire-snorting dragons with rainbow scales. Had the original zoo of Alexandria had dragons and unicorns? Phillips doubted it. But this one did; evidently it was no harder for the backstage craftsmen to manufacture mythic beasts than it was for them to turn out camels and gazelles. To Gioia and her friends all of them were equally mythical, anyway. They were just as awed by the rhinoceros as by the hippogriff. One was no more strange—nor any less—than the other. So far as Phillips had been able to discover, none of the mammals or birds of his era had survived into this one except for a few cats and dogs, though many had been reconstructed.

And then the Library! All those lost treasures, reclaimed from the jaws of time! Stupendous columned marble walls, airy high-vaulted reading-rooms, dark coiling stacks stretching away to infinity. The ivory handles of seven hundred thousand papyrus scrolls bristling on the shelves. Scholars and librarians gliding quietly about, smiling faint scholarly smiles but plainly preoccupied with serious matters of the mind. They were all temporaries, Phillips realized. Mere props, part of the illusion. But were the scrolls illusions too? "Here we have the complete dramas of Sophocles," said the guide with a blithe wave of its hand, indicating shelf upon shelf of texts. Only seven of his hundred twenty-three plays had survived the successive burnings of the library in ancient times by Romans, Christians, Arabs: were the lost ones here, the *Triptolemus*, the *Nausicaa*, the *Jason*, and all the rest? And would he find here too, miraculously restored to being, the other vanished treasures of ancient literature—the memoirs of Odysseus, Cato's history of Rome, Thucydides' life of Pericles, the missing volumes of Livy? But when he asked if he might explore the stacks, the guide smiled apologetically and said that all the librarians were busy just now. Another time, perhaps? Perhaps, said the guide. It made no difference, Phillips decided. Even if these people somehow had brought back those lost masterpieces of antiquity, how would he read them? He knew no Greek.

The life of the city buzzed and throbbed about him. It was a dazzlingly beautiful place: the vast bay thick with sails, the great avenues running

rigidly east-west, north-south, the sunlight rebounding almost audibly from the bright walls of the palaces of kings and gods. They have done this very well, Phillips thought: very well indeed. In the marketplace hard-eyed traders squabbled in half a dozen mysterious languages over the price of ebony, Arabian incense, jade, panther-skins. Gioia bought a dram of pale musky Egyptian perfume in a delicate tapering glass flask. Magicians and jugglers and scribes called out stridently to passersby, begging for a few moments of attention and a handful of coins for their labor. Strapping slaves, black and tawny and some that might have been Chinese, were put up for auction, made to flex their muscles, to bare their teeth, to bare their breasts and thighs to prospective buyers. In the gymnasium naked athletes hurled javelins and discuses, and wrestled with terrifying zeal. Gioia's friend Stengard came rushing up with a gift for her, a golden necklace that would not have embarrassed Cleopatra. An hour later she had lost it, or perhaps had given it away while Phillips was looking elsewhere. She bought another, even finer, the next day. Anyone could have all the money he wanted, simply by asking: it was as easy to come by as air, for these people.

Being here was much like going to the movies, Phillips told himself. A different show every day: not much plot, but the special effects were magnificent and the detail-work could hardly have been surpassed. A megamovie, a vast entertainment that went on all the time and was being played out by the whole population of Earth. And it was all so effortless, so spontaneous: just as when he had gone to a movie he had never troubled to think about the myriad technicians behind the scenes, the cameramen and the costume designers and the set-builders and the electricians and the model-makers and the boom operators, so too here he chose not to question the means by which Alexandria had been set before him. It felt real. It *was* real. When he drank the strong red wine it gave him a pleasant buzz. If he leaped from the beacon chamber of the Lighthouse he suspected he would die, though perhaps he would not stay dead for long: doubtless they had some way of restoring him as often as was necessary. Death did not seem to be a factor in these people's lives.

By day they saw sights. By night he and Gioia went to parties, in their hotel, in seaside villas, in the palaces of the high nobility. The usual people were there all the time, Hawk and Hekna, Aramayne, Stengard and Shelimir, Nissandra, Asoka, Afonso, Protay. At the parties there were five or ten temporaries for every citizen, some as mere servants, others as entertainers or even surrogate guests, mingling freely and a little daringly. But everyone knew, all the time, who was a citizen and who just a temporary. Phillips began to think his own status lay somewhere between. Certainly they treated him with a courtesy that no one ever would give a temporary, and yet there was a condescension to their

manner that told him not simply that he was not one of them but that he was someone or something of an altogether different order of existence. That he was Gioia's lover gave him some standing in their eyes, but not a great deal: obviously he was always going to be an outsider, a primitive, ancient and quaint. For that matter he noticed that Gioia herself, though unquestionably a member of the set, seemed to be regarded as something of an outsider, like a tradesman's great-granddaughter in a gathering of Plantagenets. She did not always find out about the best parties in time to attend; her friends did not always reciprocate her effusive greetings with the same degree of warmth; sometimes he noticed her straining to hear some bit of gossip that was not quite being shared with her. Was it because she had taken him for her lover? Or was it the other way around: that she had chosen to be his lover precisely because she was not a full member of their caste?

Being a primitive gave him, at least, something to talk about at their parties. "Tell us about war," they said. "Tell us about elections. About money. About disease." They wanted to know everything, though they did not seem to pay close attention: their eyes were quick to glaze. Still, they asked. He described traffic jams to them, and politics, and deodorants, and vitamin pills. He told them about cigarettes, newspapers, subways, telephone directories, credit cards, and basketball.

"Which was your city?" they asked. New York, he told them. "And when was it? The seventh century, did you say?" The twentieth, he told them. They exchanged glances and nodded. "We will have to do it," they said. "The World Trade Center, the Empire State Building, the Citicorp Center, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine: how fascinating! Yankee Stadium. The Verrazzano Bridge. We will do it all. But first must come Mohenjo-daro. And then, I think, Constantinople. Did your city have many people?" Seven million, he said. Just in the five boroughs alone. They nodded, smiling amiably, unfazed by the number.

Seven million, seventy million—it was all the same to them, he sensed. They would just bring forth the temporaries in whatever quantity was required. He wondered how well they would carry the job off. He was no real judge of Alexandrias and Asgards, after all. Here they could have unicorns and hippogriffs in the zoo, and live sphinxes prowling in the gutters, and it did not trouble him. Their fanciful Alexandria was as good as history's, or better. But how sad, how disillusioning it would be, if the New York that they conjured up had Greenwich Village uptown and Times Square in the Bronx, and the New Yorkers, gentle and polite, spoke with the honeyed accents of Savannah or New Orleans. Well, that was nothing he needed to brood about just now. Very likely they were only being courteous when they spoke of doing his New York. They had all the vastness of the past to choose from: Nineveh, Memphis of the

Pharaohs, the London of Victoria or Shakespeare or Richard the Third, Florence of the Medici, the Paris of Abelard and Heloise or the Paris of Louis XIV, Moctezuma's Tenochtitlan and Atahualpa's Cuzco; Damascus, St. Petersburg, Babylon, Troy. And then there were all the cities like New Chicago, out of time that was time yet unborn to him but ancient history to them. In such richness, such an infinity of choices, even mighty New York might have to wait a long while for its turn. Would he still be among them by the time they got around to it? By then, perhaps, they might have become bored with him and returned him to his own proper era. Or possibly he would simply have grown old and died. Even here, he supposed, he would eventually die, though no one else ever seemed to. He did not know. He realized that in fact he did not know anything.

The north wind blew all day long. Vast flocks of ibises appeared over the city, fleeing the heat of the interior, and screeched across the sky with their black necks and scrawny legs extended. The sacred birds, descending by the thousands, scuttered about in every crossroad, pouncing on spiders and beetles, on mice, on the debris of the meat-shops and the bakeries. They were beautiful but annoyingly ubiquitous, and they splashed their dung over the marble buildings; each morning squadrons of temporaries carefully washed it off. Gioia said little to him now. She seemed cool, withdrawn, depressed; and there was something almost intangible about her, as though she were gradually becoming transparent. He felt it would be an intrusion upon her privacy to ask her what was wrong. Perhaps it was only restlessness. She became religious, and presented costly offerings at the temples of Serapis, Isis, Poseidon, Pan. She went to the necropolis west of the city to lay wreaths on the tombs in the catacombs. In a single day she climbed the Lighthouse three times without any sign of fatigue. One afternoon he returned from a visit to the Library and found her naked on the patio; she had anointed herself all over with some aromatic green salve. Abruptly she said, "I think it's time to leave Alexandria, don't you?"

She wanted to go to Mohenjo-daro, but Mohenjo-daro was not yet ready for visitors. Instead they flew eastward to Chang-an, which they had not seen in years. It was Phillips' suggestion: he hoped that the cosmopolitan gaudiness of the old T'ang capital would lift her mood.

They were to be guests of the Emperor this time: an unusual privilege, which ordinarily had to be applied for far in advance, but Phillips had told some of Gioia's highly placed friends that she was unhappy, and they had quickly arranged everything. Three endlessly bowing functionaries in flowing yellow robes and purple sashes met them at the Gate

of Brilliant Virtue in the city's south wall and conducted them to their pavilion, close by the imperial palace and the Forbidden Garden. It was a light, airy place, thin walls of plastered brick braced by graceful columns of some dark, aromatic wood. Fountains played on the roof of green and yellow tiles, creating an unending cool rainfall of recirculating water. The balustrades were of carved marble, the door-fittings were of gold.

There was a suite of private rooms for him, and another for her, though they would share the handsome damask-draped bedroom at the heart of the pavilion. As soon as they arrived Gioia announced that she must go to her rooms to bathe and dress. "There will be a formal reception for us at the palace tonight," she said. "They say the imperial receptions are splendid beyond anything you could imagine. I want to be at my best." The Emperor and all his ministers, she told him, would receive them in the Hall of the Supreme Ultimate; there would be a banquet for a thousand people; Persian dancers would perform, and the celebrated jugglers of Chung-nan. Afterward everyone would be conducted into the fantastic landscape of the Forbidden Garden to view the dragon-races and the fireworks.

He went to his own rooms. Two delicate little maid-servants undressed him and bathed him with fragrant sponges. The pavilion came equipped with eleven temporaries who were to be their servants: soft-voiced unobtrusive cat-like Chinese, done with perfect verisimilitude, straight black hair, glowing skin, epicanthic folds. Phillips often wondered what happened to a city's temporaries when the city's time was over. Were the towering Norse heroes of Asgard being recycled at this moment into wiry dark-skinned Dravidians for Mohenjo-daro? When Timbuctoo's day was done, would its brightly robed black warriors be converted into supple Byzantines to stock the arcades of Constantinople? Or did they simply discard the old temporaries like so many excess props, stash them in warehouses somewhere, and turn out the appropriate quantities of the new model? He did not know; and once when he had asked Gioia about it she had grown uncomfortable and vague. She did not like him to probe for information, and he suspected it was because she had very little to give. These people did not seem to question the workings of their own world; his curiosities were very twentieth-century of him, he was frequently told, in that gently patronizing way of theirs. As his two little maids patted him with their sponges he thought of asking them where they had served before Chang-an. Rio? Rome? Haroun al-Raschid's Baghdad? But these fragile girls, he knew, would only giggle and retreat if he tried to question them. Interrogating temporaries was not only improper, but pointless: it was like interrogating one's luggage.

When he was bathed and robed in rich red silks he wandered the pavilion for a little while, admiring the tinkling pendants of green jade

dangling on the portico, the lustrous auburn pillars, the rainbow hues of the intricately interwoven girders and brackets that supported the roof. Then, wearying of his solitude, he approached the bamboo curtain at the entrance to Gioia's suite. A porter and one of the maids stood just within. They indicated that he should not enter; but he scowled at them and they melted from him like snowflakes. A trail of incense led him through the pavilion to Gioia's innermost dressing-room. There he halted, just outside the door.

Gioia sat naked with her back to him at an ornate dressing-table of some rare flame-colored wood inlaid with bands of orange and green porcelain. She was studying herself intently in a mirror of polished bronze held by one of her maids: picking through her scalp with her fingernails, as a woman might do who was searching out her gray hairs.

But that seemed strange. Gray hair, on Gioia? On a citizen? A temporary might display some appearance of aging, perhaps, but surely not a citizen. Citizens remained forever young. Gioia looked like a girl. Her face was smooth and unlined, her flesh was firm, her hair was dark: that was true of all of them, every citizen he had ever seen. And yet there was no mistaking what Gioia was doing. She found a hair, frowned, drew it taut, nodded, plucked it. Another. Another. She pressed the tip of her finger to her cheek as if testing it for resilience. She tugged at the skin below her eyes, pulling it downward. Such familiar little gestures of vanity; but so odd here, he thought, in this world of the perpetually young. Gioia, worried about growing old? Had he simply failed to notice the signs of age on her? Or was it that she worked hard behind his back at concealing them? Perhaps that was it. Was he wrong about the citizens, then? Did they age even as the people of less blessed eras had always done, but simply have better ways of hiding it? How old was she, anyway? Thirty? Sixty? Three hundred?

Gioia appeared satisfied now. She waved the mirror away; she rose; she beckoned for her banquet robes. Phillips, still standing unnoticed by the door, studied her with admiration: the small round buttocks, almost but not quite boyish, the elegant line of her spine, the surprising breadth of her shoulders. No, he thought, she is not aging at all. Her body is still like a girl's. She looks as young as on the day they first had met, however long ago that was—he could not say; it was hard to keep track of time here; but he was sure some years had passed since they had come together. Those gray hairs, those wrinkles and sags for which she had searched just now with such desperate intensity, must all be imaginary, mere artifacts of vanity. Even in this remote future epoch, then, vanity was not extinct. He wondered why she was so concerned with the fear of aging. An affectation? Did all these timeless people take some perverse pleasure in fretting over the possibility that they might be growing old?

Or was it some private fear of Gioia's, another symptom of the mysterious depression that had come over her in Alexandria?

Not wanting her to think that he had been spying on her, when all he had really intended was to pay her a visit, he slipped silently away to dress for the evening. She came to him an hour later, gorgeously robed, swaddled from chin to ankles in a brocade of brilliant colors shot through with threads of gold, face painted, hair drawn up tightly and fastened with ivory combs: very much the lady of the court. His servants had made him splendid also, a lustrous black surplice embroidered with golden dragons over a sweeping floor-length gown of shining white silk, a necklace and pendant of red coral, a five-cornered gray felt hat that rose in tower upon tower like a ziggurat. Gioia, grinning, touched her fingertips to his cheek. "You look marvelous!" she told him. "Like a grand mandarin!"

"And you like an empress," he said. "Of some distant land: Persia, India. Here to pay a ceremonial visit on the Son of Heaven." An excess of love suffused his spirit, and, catching her lightly by the wrist, he drew her toward him, as close as he could manage it considering how elaborate their costumes were. But as he bent forward and downward, meaning to brush his lips lightly and affectionately against the tip of her nose, he perceived an unexpected strangeness, an anomaly: the coating of white paint that was her makeup seemed oddly to magnify rather than mask the contours of her skin, highlighting and revealing details he had never observed before. He saw a pattern of fine lines radiating from the corners of her eyes, and the unmistakable beginning of a quirk-mark in her cheek just to the left of her mouth, and perhaps the faint indentation of frown-lines in her flawless forehead. A shiver traveled along the nape of his neck. So it was not affectionation, then, that had had her studying her mirror so fiercely. Age was in truth beginning to stake its claim on her, despite all that he had come to believe about these people's agelessness. But a moment later he was not so sure. Gioia turned and slid gently half a step back from him—she must have found his stare disturbing—and the lines he had thought he had seen were gone. He searched for them and saw only girlish smoothness once again. A trick of the light? A figment of an overwrought imagination? He was baffled.

"Come," she said. "We mustn't keep the Emperor waiting."

Five mustachioed warriors in armor of white quilting and seven musicians playing cymbals and pipes escorted them to the Hall of the Supreme Ultimate. There they found the full court arrayed: princes and ministers, high officials, yellow-robed monks, a swarm of imperial concubines. In a place of honor to the right of the royal thrones, which rose like gilded scaffolds high above all else, was a little group of stern-faced men in foreign costumes, the ambassadors of Rome and Byzantium, of

Arabia and Syria, of Korea, Japan, Tibet, Turkestan. Incense smouldered in enameled braziers. A poet sang a delicate twanging melody, accompanying himself on a small harp. Then the Emperor and Empress entered: two tiny aged people, like waxen images, moving with infinite slowness, taking steps no greater than a child's. There was the sound of trumpets as they ascended their thrones. When the little Emperor was seated—he looked like a doll up there, ancient, faded, shrunk, yet still somehow a figure of extraordinary power—he stretched forth both his hands, and enormous gongs began to sound. It was a scene of astonishing splendor, grand and overpowering.

These are all temporaries, Phillips realized suddenly. He saw only a handful of citizens—eight, ten, possibly as many as a dozen—scattered here and there about the vast room. He knew them by their eyes, dark, liquid, knowing. They were watching not only the imperial spectacle but also Gioia and him; and Gioia, smiling secretly, nodding almost imperceptibly to them, was acknowledging their presence and their interest. But those few were the only ones in here who were autonomous living beings. All the rest—the entire splendid court, the great mandarins and paladins, the officials, the giggling concubines, the haughty and resplendent ambassadors, the aged Emperor and Empress themselves, were simply part of the scenery. Had the world ever seen entertainment on so grand a scale before? All this pomp, all this pageantry, conjured up each night for the amusement of a dozen or so viewers?

At the banquet the little group of citizens sat together at a table apart, a round onyx slab draped with translucent green silk. There turned out to be seventeen of them in all, including Gioia; Gioia appeared to know all of them, though none, so far as he could tell, was a member of her set that he had met before. She did not attempt introductions. Nor was conversation at all possible during the meal: there was a constant astounding roaring din in the room. Three orchestras played at once and there were troupes of strolling musicians also, and a steady stream of monks and their attendants marched back and forth between the tables loudly chanting sutras and waving censers to the deafening accompaniment of drums and gongs. The Emperor did not descend from his throne to join the banquet; he seemed to be asleep, though now and then he waved his hand in time to the music. Gigantic half-naked brown slaves with broad cheekbones and mouths like gaping pockets brought forth the food, peacock tongues and breast of phoenix heaped on mounds of glowing saffron-colored rice, served on frail alabaster plates. For chopsticks they were given slender rods of dark-jade. The wine, served in glistening crystal beakers, was thick and sweet, with an aftertaste of raisins, and no beaker was allowed to remain empty for more than a moment.

Phillips felt himself growing dizzy: when the Persian dancers emerged he could not tell whether there were five of them or fifty, and as they performed their intricate whirling routines it seemed to him that their slender muslin-veiled forms were blurring and merging one into another. He felt frightened by their proficiency, and wanted to look away, but he could not. The Chung-nan jugglers that followed them were equally skillful, equally alarming, filling the air with scythes, flaming torches, live animals, rare porcelain vases, pink jade hatchets, silver bells, gilded cups, wagon-wheels, bronze vessels, and never missing a catch. The citizens applauded politely but did not seem impressed. After the jugglers, the dancers returned, performing this time on stilts; the waiters brought platters of steaming meat of a pale lavender color, unfamiliar in taste and texture: filet of camel, perhaps, or haunch of hippopotamus, or possibly some choice chop from a young dragon. There was more wine. Feebly Phillips tried to wave it away, but the servitors were implacable. This was a drier sort, greenish-gold, austere, sharp on the tongue. With it came a silver dish, chilled to a polar coldness, that held shaved ice flavored with some potent smoky-flavored brandy. The jugglers were doing a second turn, he noticed. He thought he was going to be ill. He looked helplessly toward Gioia, who seemed sober but fiercely animated, almost manic, her eyes blazing like rubies. She touched his cheek fondly.

A cool draft blew through the hall: they had opened one entire wall, revealing the garden, the night, the stars. Just outside was a colossal wheel of oiled paper stretched on wooden struts. They must have erected it in the past hour: it stood a hundred fifty feet high or even more, and on it hung lanterns by the thousands, glimmering like giant fireflies. The guests began to leave the hall. Phillips let himself be swept along into the garden, where under a yellow moon strange crook-armed trees with dense black needles loomed ominously. Gioia slipped her arm through his. They went down to a lake of bubbling crimson fluid and watched scarlet flamingo-like birds ten feet tall fastidiously spearing angry-eyed turquoise eels. They stood in awe before a fat-bellied Buddha of gleaming blue tilework, seventy feet high. A horse with a golden mane came prancing by, striking showers of brilliant red sparks wherever its hooves touched the ground. In a grove of lemon trees that seemed to have the power to wave their slender limbs about, Phillips came upon the Emperor, standing by himself and rocking gently back and forth. The old man seized Phillips by the hand and pressed something into his palm, closing his fingers tight about it; when he opened his fist a few moments later he found his palm full of gray irregular pearls. Gioia took them from him and cast them into the air, and they burst like exploding firecrackers, giving off splashes of colored light. A little later, Phillips realized that he was no longer wearing his surplice or his white silken

undergown. Gioia was naked too, and she drew him gently down into a carpet of moist blue moss, where they made love until dawn, fiercely at first, then slowly, languidly, dreamily. At sunrise he looked at her tenderly and saw that something was wrong.

"Gioia?" he said doubtfully.

She smiled. "Ah, no. Gioia is with Fenimon tonight. I am Belilala."

"With—Fenimon?"

"They are old friends. She had not seen him in years."

"Ah. I see. And you are—?"

"Belilala," she said again, touching her fingertips to his cheek.

It was not unusual, Belilala said. It happened all the time; the only unusual thing was that it had not happened to him before now. Couples formed, traveled together for a while, drifted apart, eventually reunited. It did not mean that Gioia had left him forever. It meant only that just now she chose to be with Fenimon. Gioia would return. In the meanwhile he would not be alone. "You and I met in New Chicago," Belilala told him. "And then we saw each other again in Timbuctoo. Have you forgotten? Oh, yes, I see that you have forgotten!" She laughed prettily; she did not seem at all offended.

She looked enough like Gioia to be her sister. But, then, all the citizens looked more or less alike to him. And apart from their physical resemblance, so he quickly came to realize, Belilala and Gioia were not really very similar. There was a calmness, a deep reservoir of serenity, in Belilala that Gioia, eager and volatile and ever impatient, did not seem to have. Strolling the swarming streets of Chang-an with Belilala, he did not perceive in her any of Gioia's restless feverish need always to know what lay beyond, and beyond, and beyond even that. When they toured the Hsing-ch'ing Palace, Belilala did not after five minutes begin—as Gioia surely would have done—to seek directions to the Fountain of Hsuan-tsung or the Wild Goose Pagoda. Curiosity did not consume Belilala as it did Gioia. Plainly she believed that there would always be enough time for her to see everything she cared to see. There were some days when Belilala chose not to go out at all, but was content merely to remain at their pavilion playing a solitary game with flat porcelain counters, or viewing the flowers of the garden.

He found, oddly, that he enjoyed the respite from Gioia's intense world-swallowing appetites; and yet he longed for her to return. Belilala—beautiful, gentle, tranquil, patient—was too perfect for him. She seemed unreal in her gleaming impeccability, much like one of those Sung celadon vases that appear too flawless to have been thrown and glazed by human hands. There was something a little soulless about her: an immaculate finish outside, emptiness within. Belilala might almost have been a tem-

porary; he thought, though he knew she was not. He could explore the pavilions and palaces of Chang-an with her, he could make graceful conversation with her while they dined, he could certainly enjoy coupling with her; but he could not love her or even contemplate the possibility. It was hard to imagine Belilala worriedly studying herself in a mirror for wrinkles and gray hairs. Belilala would never be any older than she was at this moment; nor could Belilala ever have been any younger. Perfection does not move along an axis of time. But the perfection of Belilala's glossy surface made her inner being impenetrable to him. Gioia was more vulnerable, more obviously flawed—her restlessness, her moodiness, her vanity, her fears—and therefore she was more accessible to his own highly imperfect twentieth-century sensibility.

Occasionally he saw Gioia as he roamed the city, or thought he did. He had a glimpse of her among the miracle-vendors in the Persian Bazaar, and outside the Zoroastrian temple, and again by the goldfish pond in the Serpentine Park. But he was never quite sure that the woman he saw was really Gioia, and he never could get close enough to her to be certain: she had a way of vanishing as he approached, like some mysterious Lorelei luring him onward and onward in a hopeless chase. After a while he came to realize that he was not going to find her until she was ready to be found.

He lost track of time. Weeks, months, years? He had no idea. In this city of exotic luxury, mystery, and magic all was in constant flux and transition and the days had a fitful, unstable quality. Buildings and even whole streets were torn down of an afternoon and re-erected, within days, far away. Grand new pagodas sprouted like toadstools in the night. Citizens came in from Asgard, Alexandria, Timbuctoo, New Chicago, stayed for a time, disappeared, returned. There was a constant round of court receptions, banquets, theatrical events, each one much like the one before. The festivals in honor of past emperors and empresses might have given some form to the year, but they seemed to occur in a random way, the ceremony marking the death of T'ai Tsung coming around twice the same year, so it seemed to him, once in a season of snow and again in high summer, and the one honoring the ascension of the Empress Wu being held twice in a single season. Perhaps he had misunderstood something. But he knew it was no use asking anyone.

One day Belilala said unexpectedly, "Shall we go to Mohenjo-daro?"

"I didn't know it was ready for visitors," he replied.

"Oh, yes. For quite some time now."

He hesitated. This had caught him unprepared. Cautiously he said, "Gioia and I were going to go there together, you know."

Belilala smiled amiably, as though the topic under discussion were nothing more than the choice of that evening's restaurant.

"Were you?" she asked.

"It was all arranged while we were still in Alexandria. To go with you instead—I don't know what to tell you, Belilala." Phillips sensed that he was growing terribly flustered. "You know that I'd like to go. With you. But on the other hand I can't help feeling that I shouldn't go there until I'm back with Gioia again. If I ever am." How foolish this sounds, he thought. How clumsy, how adolescent. He found that he was having trouble looking straight at her. Uneasily he said, with a kind of desperation in his voice, "I did promise her—there was a commitment, you understand—a firm agreement that we would go to Mohenjo-daro together—"

"Oh, but Gioia's already there!" said Belilala in the most casual way. He gaped as though she had punched him.

"What?"

"She was one of the first to go, after it opened. Months and months ago. You didn't know?" she asked, sounding surprised, but not very. "You really didn't know?"

That astonished him. He felt bewildered, betrayed, furious. His cheeks grew hot, his mouth gaped. He shook his head again and again, trying to clear it of confusion. It was a moment before he could speak. "Already there?" he said at last. "Without waiting for me? After we had talked about going there together—after we had agreed—"

Belilala laughed. "But how could she resist seeing the newest city? You know how impatient Gioia is!"

"Yes. Yes."

He was stunned. He could barely think.

"Just like all short-timers," Belilala said. "She rushes here, she rushes there. She must have it all, now, now, right away, at once, instantly. You ought never expect her to wait for you for anything for very long: the fit seizes her, and off she goes. Surely you must know that about her by now."

"A short-timer?" He had not heard that term before.

"Yes. You knew that. You must have known that." Belilala flashed her sweetest smile. She showed no sign of comprehending his distress. With a brisk wave of her hand she said, "Well, then, shall we go, you and I? To Mohenjo-daro?"

"Of course," Phillips said bleakly.

"When would you like to leave?"

"Tonight," he said. He paused a moment. "What's a short-timer, Belilala?"

Color came to her cheeks. "Isn't it obvious?" she asked.

Had there ever been a more hideous place on the face of the earth than the city of Mohenjo-daro? Phillips found it difficult to imagine one. Nor could he understand why, out of all the cities that had ever been, these people had chosen to restore this one to existence. More than ever they seemed alien to him, unfathomable, incomprehensible.

From the terrace atop the many-towered citadel he peered down into grim claustrophobic Mohenjo-daro and shivered. The stark, bleak city looked like nothing so much as some prehistoric prison colony. In the manner of an uneasy tortoise it huddled, squat and compact, against the gray monotonous Indus River plain: miles of dark burnt-brick walls enclosing miles of terrifyingly orderly streets, laid out in an awesome, monstrous gridiron pattern of maniacal rigidity. The houses themselves were dismal and forbidding too, clusters of brick cells gathered about small airless courtyards. There were no windows, only small doors that opened not onto the main boulevards but onto the tiny mysterious lanes that ran between the buildings. Who had designed this horrifying metropolis? What harsh, sour souls they must have had, these frightening and frightened folk, creating for themselves in the lush fertile plains of India such a Supreme Soviet of a city!

"How lovely it is," Belilala murmured. "How fascinating!"

He stared at her in amazement.

"Fascinating? Yes," he said. "I suppose so. The same way that the smile of a cobra is fascinating."

"What's a cobra?"

"Poisonous predatory serpent," Phillips told her. "Probably extinct. Or formerly extinct, more likely. It wouldn't surprise me if you people had re-created a few and turned them loose in Mohenjo to make things livelier."

"You sound angry, Charles."

"Do I? That's not how I feel."

"How do you feel, then?"

"I don't know," he said after a long moment's pause. He shrugged. "Lost, I suppose. Very far from home."

"Poor Charles."

"Standing here in this ghastly barracks of a city, listening to you tell me how beautiful it is, I've never felt more alone in my life."

"You miss Gioia very much, don't you?"

He gave her another startled look.

"Gioia has nothing to do with it. She's probably been having ecstasies over the loveliness of Mohenjo just like you. Just like all of you. I suppose I'm the only one who can't find the beauty, the charm. I'm the only one who looks out there and sees only horror, and then wonders why nobody

else sees it, why in fact people would set up a place like this for *entertainment, for pleasure*—”

Her eyes were gleaming. “Oh, you are angry! You really are!”

“Does that fascinate you too?” he snapped. “A demonstration of genuine primitive emotion? A typical quaint twentieth-century outburst?” He paced the rampart in short quick anguished steps. “Ah. Ah. I think I understand it now, Belilala. Of course: I’m part of your circus, the star of the sideshow. I’m the first experiment in setting up the next stage of it, in fact.” Her eyes were wide. The sudden harshness and violence in his voice seemed to be alarming and exciting her at the same time. That angered him even more. Fiercely he went on, “Bringing whole cities back out of time was fun for a while, but it lacks a certain authenticity, eh? For some reason you couldn’t bring the inhabitants too; you couldn’t just grab a few million prehistorics out of Egypt or Greece or India and dump them down in this era, I suppose because you might have too much trouble controlling them, or because you’d have the problem of disposing of them once you were bored with them. So you had to settle for creating temporaries to populate your ancient cities. But now you’ve got me. I’m something more real than a temporary, and that’s a terrific novelty for you, and novelty is the thing you people crave more than anything else: maybe the *only* thing you crave. And here I am, complicated, unpredictable, edgy, capable of anger, fear, sadness, love, and all those other formerly extinct things. Why settle for picturesque architecture when you can observe picturesque emotion, too? What fun I must be for all of you! And if you decide that I was really interesting, maybe you’ll ship me back where I came from and check out a few other ancient types—a Roman gladiator, maybe, or a Renaissance pope, or even a Neanderthal or two—

“Charles,” she said tenderly. “Oh, Charles, Charles, Charles, how lonely you must be; how lost, how troubled! Will you ever forgive me? Will you ever forgive us all?”

Once more he was astounded by her. She sounded entirely sincere, altogether sympathetic. Was she? Was she, really? He was not sure he had ever had a sign of genuine caring from any of them before, not even Gióia. Nor could he bring himself to trust Belilala now. He was afraid of her, afraid of all of them, of their brittleness, their slyness, their elegance. He wished he could go to her and have her take him in her arms; but he felt too much the shaggy prehistoric just now to be able to risk asking that comfort of her.

He turned away and began to walk around the rim of the citadel’s massive wall.

“Charles?”

“Let me alone for a little while,” he said.

He walked on. His forehead throbbed and there was a pounding in his chest. All stress systems going full blast, he thought: secret glands dumping gallons of inflammatory substances into his bloodstream. The heat, the inner confusion, the repellent look of this place—

Try to understand, he thought. Relax. Look about you. Try to enjoy your holiday in Mohenjo-daro.

He leaned warily outward, over the edge of the wall. He had never seen a wall like this; it must be forty feet thick at the base, he guessed, perhaps even more, and every brick perfectly shaped, meticulously set. Beyond the great rampart, marshes ran almost to the edge of the city, although close by the wall the swamps had been dammed and drained for agriculture. He saw lithe brown farmers down there, busy with their wheat and barley and peas. Cattle and buffaloes grazed a little farther out. The air was heavy, dank, humid. All was still. From somewhere close at hand came the sound of a droning, whining stringed instrument and a steady insistent chanting.

Gradually a sort of peace pervaded him. His anger subsided. He felt himself beginning to grow calm again. He looked back at the city, the rigid interlocking streets, the maze of inner lanes, the millions of courses of precise brickwork.

It is a miracle, he told himself, that this city is here in this place and at this time. And it is a miracle that I am here to see it.

Caught for a moment by the magic within the bleakness, he thought he began to understand Belilala's awe and delight, and he wished now that he had not spoken to her so sharply. The city was alive. Whether it was the actual Mohenjo-daro of thousands upon thousands of years ago, ripped from the past by some wondrous hook, or simply a cunning reproduction, did not matter at all. Real or not, this was the true Mohenjo-daro. It had been dead and now, for the moment, it was alive again. These people, these *citizens*, might be trivial, but reconstructing Mohenjo-daro was no trivial achievement. And that the city that had been reconstructed was oppressive and sinister-looking was unimportant. No one was compelled to live in Mohenjo-daro any more. Its time had come and gone, long ago; those little dark-skinned peasants and craftsmen and merchants down there were mere temporaries, mere inanimate things, conjured up like zombies to enhance the illusion. They did not need his pity. Nor did he need to pity himself. He knew that he should be grateful for the chance to behold these things. Some day, when this dream had ended and his hosts had returned him to the world of subways and computers and income tax and television networks, he would think of Mohenjo-daro as he had once beheld it, lofty walls of tightly woven dark brick under a heavy sky, and he would remember only its beauty.

Glancing back, he searched for Belilala and could not for a moment

find her. Then he caught sight of her carefully descending a narrow staircase that angled down the inner face of the citadel wall.

"Belilala!" he called.

She paused and looked his way, shading her eyes from the sun with her hand. "Are you all right?"

"Where are you going?"

"To the baths," she said. "Do you want to come?"

He nodded. "Yes. Wait for me, will you? I'll be right there." He began to run toward her along the top of the wall.

The baths were attached to the citadel: a great open tank the size of a large swimming pool, lined with bricks set on edge in gypsum mortar and waterproofed with asphalt, and eight smaller tanks just north of it in a kind of covered arcade. He supposed that in ancient times the whole complex had had some ritual purpose, the large tank used by common folk and the small chambers set aside for the private ablutions of priests or nobles. Now the baths were maintained, it seemed, entirely for the pleasure of visiting citizens. As Phillips came up the passageway that led to the main bath he saw fifteen or twenty of them lolling in the water or padding languidly about, while temporaries of the dark-skinned Mohenjo-daro type served them drinks and pungent little morsels of spiced meat as though this were some sort of luxury resort. Which was, he realized, exactly what it was. The temporaries wore white cotton loin-cloths; the citizens were naked. In his former life he had encountered that sort of casual public nudity a few times on visits to California and the south of France, and it had made him mildly uneasy. But he was growing accustomed to it here.

The changing-rooms were tiny brick cubicles connected by rows of closely placed steps to the courtyard that surrounded the central tank. They entered one and Belilala swiftly slipped out of the loose cotton robe that she had worn since their arrival that morning. With arms folded she stood leaning against the wall, waiting for him. After a moment he dropped his own robe and followed her outside. He felt a little giddy, sauntering around naked in the open like this.

On the way to the main bathing area they passed the private baths. None of them seemed to be occupied. They were elegantly constructed chambers, with finely jointed brick floors and carefully designed runnels to drain excess water into the passageway that led to the primary drain. Phillips was struck with admiration for the cleverness of the prehistoric engineers. He peered into this chamber and that to see how the conduits and ventilating ducts were arranged, and when he came to the last room in the sequence he was surprised and embarrassed to discover that it was in use. A brawny grinning man, big-muscled, deep-chested, with

exuberantly flowing shoulder-length red hair and a flamboyant, sharply tapering beard, was thrashing about merrily with two women in the small tank. Phillips had a quick glimpse of a lively tangle of arms, legs, breasts, buttocks.

"Sorry," he muttered. His cheeks reddened. Quickly he ducked out, blurting apologies as he went. "Didn't realize the room was occupied—no wish to intrude—"

Belilala had proceeded on down the passageway. Phillips hurried after her. From behind him came peals of cheerful raucous booming laughter and high-pitched giggling and the sound of splashing water. Probably they had not even noticed him.

He paused a moment, puzzled, playing back in his mind that one startling glimpse. Something was not right. Those women, he was fairly sure, were citizens: little slender elfin dark-haired girlish creatures, the standard model. But the man? That great curling sweep of red hair? Not a citizen. Citizens did not affect shoulder-length hair. And *red*? Nor had he ever seen a citizen so burly, so powerfully muscular. Or one with a beard. But he could hardly be a temporary, either. Phillips could conceive no reason why there would be so Anglo-Saxon-looking a temporary at Mohenjo-daro; and it was unthinkable for a temporary to be frolicking like that with citizens, anyway.

"Charles?"

He looked up ahead. Belilala stood at the end of the passageway, outlined in a nimbus of brilliant sunlight. "Charles?" she said again. "Did you lose your way?"

"I'm right here behind you," he said. "I'm coming."

"Who did you meet in there?"

"A man with a beard."

"With a what?"

"A beard," he said. "Red hair growing on his face. I wonder who he is."

"Nobody I know," said Belilala. "The only one I know with hair on his face is you. And yours is black, and you shave it off every day." She laughed. "Come along, now! I see some friends by the pool!"

He caught up with her and they went hand in hand out into the courtyard. Immediately a waiter glided up to them, an obsequious little temporary with a tray of drinks. Phillips waved it away and headed for the pool. He felt terribly exposed; he imagined that the citizens disporting themselves here were staring intently at him, studying his hairy primitive body as though he were some mythical creature, a Minotaur, a werewolf, summoned up for their amusement. Belilala drifted off to talk to someone and he slipped into the water, grateful for the concealment it offered. It was deep, warm, comforting. With swift powerful strokes he breast-stroked from one end to the other.

A citizen perched elegantly on the pool's rim smiled at him. "Ah, so you've come at last, Charles!" Char-less. Two syllables. Someone from Gioia's set: Stengard, Hawk, Aramayne? He could not remember which one. They were all so much alike.

Phillips returned the man's smile in a half-hearted, tentative way. He searched for something to say and finally asked, "Have you been here long?"

"Weeks. Perhaps months. What a splendid achievement this city is, eh, Charles? Such utter unity of mood—such a total statement of a uniquely single-minded esthetic—"

"Yes. Single-minded is the word," Phillips said drily.

"Gioia's word, actually. Gioia's phrase. I was merely quoting."

Gioia. He felt as if he had been stabbed.

"You've spoken to Gioia lately?" he said.

"Actually, no. It was Hekna who saw her. You do remember Hekna, eh?" He nodded toward two naked women standing on the brick platform that bordered the pool, chatting, delicately nibbling morsels of meat. They could have been twins. "There is Hekna, with your Belilala." Hekna, yes. So this must be Hawk, Phillips thought, unless there has been some recent shift of couples. "How sweet she is, your Belilala," Hawk said. "Gioia chose very wisely when she picked her for you."

Another stab: a much deeper one. "Is that how it was?" he said. "Gioia picked Belilala for me?"

"Why, of course!" Hawk seemed surprised. It went without saying, evidently. "What did you think? That Gioia would merely go off and leave you to fend for yourself?"

"Hardly. Not Gioia."

"She's very tender, very gentle, isn't she?"

"You mean Belilala? Yes, very," said Phillips carefully. "A dear woman, a wonderful woman. But of course I hope to get together with Gioia again soon." He paused. "They say she's been in Mohenjo-daro almost since it opened."

"She was here, yes."

"Was?"

"Oh, you know Gioia," Hawk said lightly. "She's moved along by now, naturally."

Phillips leaned forward. "Naturally," he said. Tension thickened his voice. "Where has she gone this time?"

"Timbuctoo, I think. Or New Chicago. I forget which one it was. She was telling us that she hoped to be in Timbuctoo for the closing-down party. But then Fenimon had some pressing reason for going to New Chicago. I can't remember what they decided to do." Hawk gestured sadly. "Either way, a pity that she left Mohenjo before the new visitor

came. She had such a rewarding time with you, after all: I'm sure she'd have found much to learn from him also."

The unfamiliar term twanged an alarm deep in Phillips' consciousness. "Visitor?" he said, angling his head sharply toward Hawk. "What visitor do you mean?"

"You haven't met him yet? Oh, of course, you've only just arrived."

Phillips moistened his lips. "I think I may have seen him. Long red hair? Beard like this?"

"That's the one! Willoughby, he's called. He's—what?—a Viking, a pirate, something like that. Tremendous vigor and force. Remarkable person. We should have many more visitors, I think. They're far superior to temporaries, everyone agrees. Talking with a temporary is a little like talking to one's self, wouldn't you say? They give you no significant illumination. But a visitor—someone like this Willoughby—or like you, Charles—a visitor can be truly enlightening, a visitor can transform one's view of reality—"

"Excuse me," Phillips said. A throbbing began behind his forehead. "Perhaps we can continue this conversation later, yes?" He put the flats of his hands against the hot brick of the platform and hoisted himself swiftly from the pool. "At dinner, maybe—or afterward—yes? All right?" He set off at a quick half-trot back toward the passageway that led to the private baths.

As he entered the roofed part of the structure his throat grew dry, his breath suddenly came short. He padded quickly up the hall and peered into the little bath-chamber. The bearded man was still there, sitting up in the tank, breast-high above the water, with one arm around each of the women. His eyes gleamed with fiery intensity in the dimness. He was grinning in marvelous self-satisfaction; he seemed to brim with intensity, confidence, gusto.

Let him be what I think he is, Phillips prayed. I have been alone among these people long enough.

"May I come in?" he asked.

"Aye, fellow!" cried the man in the tub thunderously. "By my troth, come ye in, and bring your lass as well! God's teeth, I wot there's room aplenty for more folk in this tub than we!"

At that great uproarious outcry Phillips felt a powerful surge of joy. What a joyous rowdy voice! How rich, how lusty, how totally uncitizen-like!

And those oddly archaic words! *God's teeth? By my troth?* What sort of talk was that? What else but the good pure sonorous Elizabethan diction! Certainly it had something of the roll and fervor of Shakespeare

about it. And spoken with—an Irish brogue, was it? No, not quite: it was English, but English spoken in no manner Phillips had ever heard.

Citizens did not speak that way. But a *visitor* might.

So it was true. Relief flooded Phillips' soul. Not alone, then! Another relict of a former age—another wanderer—a companion in chaos, a brother in adversity—a fellow voyager, tossed even farther than he had been by the tempests of time—

The bearded man grinned heartily and beckoned to Phillips with a toss of his head. "Well, join us, join us, man! 'Tis good to see an English face again, amidst all these Moors and rogue Portugals! But what have ye done with thy lass? One can never have enough wenches, d'ye not agree?"

The force and vigor of him were extraordinary: almost too much so. He roared, he bellowed, he boomed. He was so very much what he ought to be that he seemed more a character out of some old pirate movie than anything else, so blustering, so real, that he seemed unreal. A stage-Elizabethan, larger than life, a boisterous young Falstaff without the belly.

Hoarsely, Phillips said, "Who are you?"

"Why, Ned Willoughby's son Francis am I, of Plymouth. Late of the service of Her Most Protestant Majesty, but most foully abducted by the powers of darkness and cast away among these blackamoor Hindus, or whatever they be. And thyself?"

"Charles Phillips." After a moment's uncertainty he added, "I'm from New York."

"New York? What place is that? In faith, man, I know it not!"

"A city in America."

"A city in America, forsooth! What a fine fancy that is! In America, you say, and not on the Moon, or perchance underneath the sea?" To the women Willoughby said, "D'ye hear him? He comes from a city in America! With the face of an Englishman, though not the manner of one, and not quite the proper sort of speech. A city in America! A *city*. God's blood, what will I hear next?"

Phillips trembled. Awe was beginning to take hold of him. This man had walked the streets of Shakespeare's London, perhaps. He had clinked canisters with Marlowe or Essex or Walter Raleigh; he had watched the ships of the Armada wallowing in the Channel. It strained Phillips' spirit to think of it. This strange dream in which he found himself was compounding its strangeness now. He felt like a weary swimmer assailed by heavy surf, winded, dazed. The hot close atmosphere of the baths was driving him toward vertigo. There could be no doubt of it any longer. He was not the only primitive—the only *visitor*—who was wandering loose in this fiftieth century. They were conducting other experiments as well.

He gripped the sides of the door to steady himself and said, "When you speak of Her Most Protestant Majesty, it's Elizabeth the First you mean, is that not so?"

"Elizabeth, aye! As to the First, that is true enough, but why trouble to name her thus? There is but one. First and Last, I do trow, and God save her, there is no other!"

Phillips studied the other man warily. He knew that he must proceed with care. A misstep at this point and he would forfeit any chance that Willoughby would take him seriously. How much metaphysical bewilderment, after all, could this man absorb? What did he know, what had anyone of his time known, of past and present and future and the notion that one might somehow move from one to the other as readily as one would go from Surrey to Kent? That was a twentieth-century idea, late nineteenth at best, a fantastical speculation that very likely no one had even considered before Wells had sent his time traveler off to stare at the reddened sun of the earth's last twilight. Willoughby's world was a world of Protestants and Catholics, of kings and queens, of tiny sailing vessels, of swords at the hip and ox-carts on the road: that world seemed to Phillips far more alien and distant than was this world of citizens and temporaries. The risk that Willoughby would not begin to understand him was great.

But this man and he were natural allies against a world they had never made. Phillips chose to take the risk.

"Elizabeth the First is the queen you serve," he said. "There will be another of her name in England, in due time. Has already been, in fact."

Willoughby shook his head like a puzzled lion. "Another Elizabeth, d'ye say?"

"A second one, and not much like the first. Long after your Virgin Queen, this one. She will reign in what you think of as the days to come. That I know without doubt."

The Englishman peered at him and frowned. "You see the future? Are you a soothsayer, then? A necromancer, mayhap? Or one of the very demons that brought me to this place?"

"Not at all," Phillips said gently. "Only a lost soul, like yourself." He stepped into the little room and crouched by the side of the tank. The two citizen-women were staring at him in bland fascination. He ignored them. To Willoughby he said, "Do you have any idea where you are?"

The Englishman had guessed, rightly enough, that he was in India: "I do believe these little brown Moorish folk are of the Hindu sort," he said. But that was as far as his comprehension of what had befallen him could go.

It had not occurred to him that he was no longer living in the sixteenth

century. And of course he did not begin to suspect that this strange and somber brick city in which he found himself was a wanderer out of an era even more remote than his own. Was there any way, Phillips wondered, of explaining that to him?

He had been here only three days. He thought it was devils that had carried him off. "While I slept did they come for me," he said. "Mephistophilis Sathanas his henchmen seized me—God alone can say why—and swept me in a moment out to this torrid realm from England, where I had reposed among friends and family. For I was between one voyage and the next, you must understand, awaiting Drake and his ship—you know Drake, the glorious Francis? God's blood, there's a mariner for ye! We were to go to the Main again, he and I, but instead here I be in this other place—" Willoughby leaned close and said, "I ask you, soothsayer, how can it be, that a man go to sleep in Plymouth and wake up in India? It is passing strange, is it not?"

"That it is," Phillips said.

"But he that is in the dance must needs dance on, though he do but hop, eh? So do I believe." He gestured toward the two citizen-women. "And therefore to console myself in this pagan land I have found me some sport among these little Portugal women—"

"Portugal?" said Phillips.

"Why, what else can they be, but Portugals? Is it not the Portugals who control all these coasts of India? See, the people are of two sorts here, the blackamoors and the others, the fair-skinned ones, the lords and masters who lie here in these baths. If they be not Hindus, and I think they are not, then Portugals is what they must be." He laughed and pulled the women against himself and rubbed his hands over their breasts as though they were fruits on a vine. "Is that not what you are, you little naked shameless Papist wenches? A pair of Portugals, eh?"

They giggled, but did not answer.

"No," Phillips said. "This is India, but not the India you think you know. And these women are not Portuguese."

"Not Portuguese?" Willoughby said, baffled.

"No more so than you: I'm quite certain of that."

Willoughby stroked his beard. "I do admit I found them very odd, for Portugals. I have heard not a syllable of their Portugee speech on their lips. And it is strange also that they run naked as Adam and Eve in these baths, and allow me free plunder of their women, which is not the way of Portugals at home, God wot. But I thought me, this is India, they choose to live in another fashion here—"

"No," Phillips said. "I tell you, these are not Portuguese, nor any other people of Europe who are known to you."

"Prithee, who are they, then?"

Do it delicately, now, Phillips warned himself. *Delicately.*

He said, "It is not far wrong to think of them as spirits of some kind—demons, even. Or sorcerers who have magicked us out of our proper places in the world." He paused, groping for some means to share with Willoughby, in a way that Willoughby might grasp, this mystery that had enfolded them. He drew a deep breath. "They've taken us not only across the sea," he said, "but across the years as well. We have both been hauled, you and I, far into the days that are to come."

Willoughby gave him a look of blank bewilderment.

"Days that are to come? Times yet unborn, d'ye mean? Why, I comprehend none of that!"

"Try to understand. We're both castaways in the same boat, man! But there's no way we can help each other if I can't make you see—"

Shaking his head, Willoughby muttered, "In faith, good friend, I find your words the merest folly. Today is today, and tomorrow is tomorrow, and how can a man step from one to t'other until tomorrow be turned into today?"

"I have no idea," said Phillips. Struggle was apparent on Willoughby's face; but plainly he could perceive no more than the haziest outline of what Phillips was driving at, if that much. "But this I know," he went on, "that your world and all that was in it is dead and gone. And so is mine, though I was born four hundred years after you, in the time of the second Elizabeth."

Willoughby snorted scornfully. "Four hundred—"

"You must believe me!"

"Nay! Nay!"

"It's the truth. Your time is only history to me. And mine and yours are history to *them*—ancient history. They call us visitors, but what we are is captives." Phillips felt himself quivering in the intensity of his effort. He was aware how insane this must sound to Willoughby. It was beginning to sound insane to him. "They've stolen us out of our proper times—seizing us like gypsies in the night—"

"Fie, man! You rave with lunacy!"

Phillips shook his head. He reached out and seized Willoughby tightly by the wrist. "I beg you, listen to me!" The citizen-women were watching closely, whispering to one another behind their hands, laughing. "Ask them!" Phillips cried. "Make them tell you what century this is! The sixteenth, do you think? Ask them!"

"What century could it be, but the sixteenth of our Lord?"

"They will tell you it is the fiftieth."

Willoughby looked at him pityingly. "Man, man, what a sorry thing thou art! The fiftieth, indeed!" He laughed. "Fellow, listen to me, now. There is but one Elizabeth, safe upon her throne in Westminster. This

is India. The year is Anno 1591. Come, let us you and I steal a ship from these Portugals, and make our way back to England, and peradventure you may get from there to your America—”

“There is no England.”

“Ah, can you say that and not be mad?”

“The cities and nations we knew are gone. These people live like magicians, Francis.” There was no use holding anything back now, Phillips thought leadenly. He knew that he had lost. “They conjure up places of long ago, and build them here and there to suit their fancy, and when they are bored with them they destroy them, and start anew. There is no England. Europe is empty, featureless, void. Do you know what cities there are? There are only five in all the world. There is Alexandria of Egypt. There is Timbuctoo in Africa. There is New Chicago in America. There is a great city in China—in Cathay, I suppose you would say. And there is this place, which they call Mohenjo-daro, and which is far more ancient than Greece, than Rome, than Babylon.”

Quietly Willoughby said, “Nay. This is mere absurdity. You say we are in some far tomorrow, and then you tell me we are dwelling in some city of long ago.”

“A conjuration, only,” Phillips said in desperation. “A likeness of that city. Which these folk have fashioned somehow for their own amusement. Just as we are here, you and I: to amuse them. Only to amuse them.”

“You are completely mad.”

“Come with me, then. Talk with the citizens by the great pool. Ask them what year this is; ask them about England; ask them how you come to be here.” Once again Phillips grasped Willoughby’s wrist. “We should be allies. If we work together, perhaps we can discover some way to get ourselves out of this place, and—”

“Let me be, fellow.”

“Please—”

“Let me be!” roared Willoughby, and pulled his arm free. His eyes were stark with rage. Rising in the tank, he looked about furiously as though searching for a weapon. The citizen-women shrank back away from him, though at the same time they seemed captivated by the big man’s fierce outburst. “Go to, get you to Bedlam! Let me be, madman! Let me be!”

Dismally Phillips roamed the dusty unpaved streets of Mohenjo-daro alone for hours. His failure with Willoughby had left him bleak-spirited and somber: he had hoped to stand back to back with the Elizabethan against the citizens, but he saw now that that was not to be. He had bungled things; or, more likely, it had been impossible ever to bring Willoughby to see the truth of their predicament.

In the stifling heat he went at random through the confusing congested

lanes of flat-roofed, windowless houses and blank, featureless walls until he emerged into a broad marketplace. The life of the city swirled madly around him: the pseudo-life, rather, the intricate interactions of the thousands of temporaries who were nothing more than wind-up dolls set in motion to provide the illusion that pre-Vedic India was still a going concern. Here vendors sold beautiful little carved stone seals portraying tigers and monkeys and strange humped cattle, and women bargained vociferously with craftsmen for ornaments of ivory, gold, copper, and bronze. Weary-looking women squatted behind immense mounds of newly made pottery, pinkish-red with black designs. No one paid any attention to him. He was the outsider here, neither citizen nor temporary. They belonged.

He went on, passing the huge granaries where workmen ceaselessly unloaded carts of wheat and others pounded grain on great circular brick platforms. He drifted into a public restaurant thronging with joyless silent people standing elbow to elbow at small brick counters, and was given a flat round piece of bread, a sort of tortilla or chapatti, in which was stuffed some spiced mincemeat that stung his lips like fire. Then he moved onward, down a wide, shallow, timbered staircase into the lower part of the city, where the peasantry lived in cell-like rooms packed together as though in hives.

It was an oppressive city, but not a squalid one. The intensity of the concern with sanitation amazed him: wells and fountains and public privies everywhere, and brick drains running from each building, leading to covered cesspools. There was none of the open sewage and pestilent gutters that he knew still could be found in the India of his own time. He wondered whether ancient Mohenjo-daro had in truth been so fastidious. Perhaps the citizens had redesigned the city to suit their own ideals of cleanliness. No: most likely what he saw was authentic, he decided, a function of the same obsessive discipline that had given the city its rigidity of form. If Mohenjo-daro had been a verminous filthy hole, the citizens probably would have re-created it in just that way, and loved it for its fascinating, reeking filth.

Not that he had ever noticed an excessive concern with authenticity on the part of the citizens; and Mohenjo-daro, like all the other restored cities he had visited, was full of the usual casual anachronisms. Phillips saw images of Shiva and Krishna here and there on the walls of buildings he took to be temples, and the benign face of the mother-goddess Kali loomed in the plazas. Surely those deities had arisen in India long after the collapse of the Mohenjo-daro civilization. Were the citizens indifferent to such matters of chronology? Or did they take a certain naughty pleasure in mixing the eras—a mosque and a church in Greek Alexandria, Hindu gods in prehistoric Mohenjo-daro? Perhaps their records of the

past had become contaminated with errors over the thousands of years. He would not have been surprised to see banners bearing portraits of Gandhi and Nehru being carried in procession through the streets. And there were phantasms and chimeras at large here again too, as if the citizens were untroubled by the boundary between history and myth: little fat elephant-headed Ganeshas blithely plunging their trunks into water-fountains, a six-armed, three-headed woman sunning herself on a brick terrace. Why not? Surely that was the motto of these people: *Why not, why not, why not?* They could do as they pleased, and they did. Yet Gioia had said to him, long ago, "Limits are very important." In what, Phillips wondered, did they limit themselves, other than the number of their cities? Was there a quota, perhaps, on the number of "visitors" they allowed themselves to kidnap from the past? Until today he had thought he was the only one; now he knew there was at least one other; possibly there were more elsewhere, a step or two ahead or behind him, making the circuit with the citizens who traveled endlessly from New Chicago to Chang-an to Alexandria. We should join forces, he thought, and compel them to send us back to our rightful eras. *Compel?* How? File a class-action suit, maybe? Demonstrate in the streets? Sadly he thought of his failure to make common cause with Willoughby. We are natural allies, he thought. Together perhaps we might have won some compassion from these people. But to Willoughby it must be literally unthinkable that Good Queen Bess and her subjects were sealed away on the far side of a barrier hundreds of centuries thick. He would prefer to believe that England was just a few months' voyage away around the Cape of Good Hope, and that all he need do was commandeer a ship and set sail for home. Poor Willoughby: probably he would never see his home again.

The thought came to Phillips suddenly:

Neither will you.

And then, after it:

If you could go home, would you really want to?

One of the first things he had realized here was that he knew almost nothing substantial about his former existence. His mind was well stocked with details on life in twentieth-century New York, to be sure; but of himself he could say not much more than that he was Charles Phillips and had come from 1984. Profession? Age? Parents' names? Did he have a wife? Children? A cat, a dog, hobbies? No data: none. Possibly the citizens had stripped such things from him when they brought him here, to spare him from the pain of separation. They might be capable of that kindness. Knowing so little of what he had lost, could he truly say that he yearned for it? Willoughby seemed to remember much more of his former life, and longed for it all the more. He was spared that. Why not stay here, and go on and on from city to city, sightseeing all of

time past as the citizens conjured it back into being? Why not? Why not? The chances were that he had no choice about it, anyway.

He made his way back up toward the citadel and to the baths once more. He felt a little like a ghost, haunting a city of ghosts.

Belilala seemed unaware that he had been gone for most of the day. She sat by herself on the terrace of the baths, placidly sipping some thick milky beverage that had been sprinkled with a dark spice. He shook his head when she offered him some.

"Do you remember I mentioned that I saw a man with red hair and a beard this morning?" Phillips said. "He's a visitor. Hawk told me that."

"Is he?" Belilala asked.

"From a time about four-hundred years before mine. I talked with him. He thinks he was brought here by demons." Phillips gave her a searching look. "I'm a visitor too, isn't that so?"

"Of course, love."

"And how was I brought here? By demons also?"

Belilala smiled indifferently. "You'd have to ask someone else. Hawk, perhaps. I haven't looked into these things very deeply."

"I see. Are there many visitors here, do you know?"

A languid shrug. "Not many, no, not really. I've only heard of three or four besides you. There may be others by now, I suppose." She rested her hand lightly on his. "Are you having a good time in Mohenjo, Charles?"

He let her question pass as though he had not heard it.

"I asked Hawk about Gioia," he said.

"Oh?"

"He told me that she's no longer here, that she's gone on to Timbuctoo or New Chicago, he wasn't sure which."

"That's quite likely. As everybody knows, Gioia rarely stays in the same place very long."

Phillips nodded. "You said the other day that Gioia is a short-timer. That means she's going to grow old and die, doesn't it?"

"I thought you understood that, Charles."

"Whereas you will not age? Nor Hawk, nor Stengard, nor any of the rest of your set?"

"We will live as long as we wish," she said. "But we will not age, no."

"What makes a person a short-timer?"

"They're born that way, I think. Some missing gene, some extra gene—I don't actually know. It's extremely uncommon. Nothing can be done to help them. It's very slow, the aging. But it can't be halted."

Phillips nodded. "That must be very disagreeable," he said. "To find yourself one of the few people growing old in a world where everyone stays young. No wonder Gioia is so impatient. No wonder she runs around

from place to place. No wonder she attached herself so quickly to the barbaric hairy visitor from the twentieth century, who comes from a time when *everybody* was a short-timer. She and I have something in common, wouldn't you say?"

"In a manner of speaking, yes."

"We understand aging. We understand death. Tell me: is Gioia likely to die very soon, Belilala?"

"Soon? Soon?" She gave him a wide-eyed child-like stare. "What is soon? How can I say? What you think of as soon and what I think of as soon are not the same things, Charles." Then her manner changed: she seemed to be hearing what he was saying for the first time. Softly she said, "No, no, Charles. I don't think she will die very soon."

"When she left me in Chang-an, was it because she had become bored with me?"

Belilala shook her head. "She was simply restless. It had nothing to do with you. She was never bored with you."

"Then I'm going to go looking for her. Wherever she may be, Timbuctoo, New Chicago, I'll find her. Gioia and I belong together."

"Perhaps you do," said Belilala. "Yes. Yes, I think you really do." She sounded altogether unperturbed, unrejected, unbereft. "By all means, Charles. Go to her. Follow her. Find her. Wherever she may be."

They had already begun dismantling Timbuctoo when Phillips got there. While he was still high overhead, his flutterflutter hovering above the dusty tawny plain where the River Niger met the sands of the Sahara, a surge of keen excitement rose in him as he looked down at the square gray flat-roofed mud brick buildings of the great desert capital. But when he landed he found gleaming metal-skinned robots swarming everywhere, a horde of them scuttling about like giant shining insects, pulling the place apart.

He had not known about the robots before. So that was how all these miracles were carried out, Phillips realized: an army of obliging machines. He imagined them bustling up out of the earth whenever their services were needed, emerging from some sterile subterranean storehouse to put together Venice or Thebes or Knossos or Houston or whatever place was required, down to the finest detail, and then at some later time returning to undo everything that they had fashioned. He watched them now, diligently pulling down the adobe walls, demolishing the heavy metal-studded gates, bulldozing the amazing labyrinth of alleyways and thoroughfares, sweeping away the market. On his last visit to Timbuctoo that market had been crowded with a horde of veiled Tuaregs and swaggering Moors, black Sudanese, shrewd-faced Syrian traders, all of them busily dickering for camels, horses, donkeys, slabs of salt, huge

green melons, silver bracelets, splendid vellum Korans. They were all gone now, that picturesque crowd of swarthy temporaries. Nor were there any citizens to be seen. The dust of destruction choked the air. One of the robots came up to Phillips and said in a dry crackling insect-voice, "You ought not to be here. This city is closed."

He stared at the flashing, buzzing band of scanners and sensors across the creature's glittering tapered snout. "I'm trying to find someone, a citizen who may have been here recently. Her name is—"

"This city is closed," the robot repeated inexorably.

They would not let him stay as much as an hour. There is no food here, the robot said, no water, no shelter. This is not a place any longer. You may not stay. You may not stay. You may not stay.

This is not a place any longer.

Perhaps he could find her in New Chicago, then. He took to the air again, soaring northward and westward over the vast emptiness. The land below him curved away into the hazy horizon, bare, sterile. What had they done with the vestiges of the world that had gone before? Had they turned their gleaming metal beetles loose to clean everything away? Were there no ruins of genuine antiquity anywhere? No scrap of Rome, no shard of Jerusalem, no stump of Fifth Avenue? It was all so barren down there: an empty stage, waiting for its next set to be built. He flew on a great arc across the jutting hump of Africa and on into what he supposed was southern Europe: the little vehicle did all the work, leaving him to doze or stare as he wished. Now and again he saw another flitterflitter pass by, far away, a dark distant winged teardrop outlined against the hard clarity of the sky. He wished there was some way of making radio contact with them, but he had no idea how to go about it. Not that he had anything he wanted to say; he wanted only to hear a human voice. He was utterly isolated. He might just as well have been the last living man on Earth. He closed his eyes and thought of Gioia.

"Like this?" Phillips asked. In an ivory-paneled oval room sixty stories above the softly glowing streets of New Chicago he touched a small cool plastic canister to his upper lip and pressed the stud at its base. He heard a foaming sound; and then blue vapor rose to his nostrils.

"Yes," Cantilena said. "That's right."

He detected a faint aroma of cinnamon, cloves, and something that might almost have been broiled lobster. Then a spasm of dizziness hit him and visions rushed through his head: Gothic cathedrals, the Pyramids, Central Park under fresh snow, the harsh brick warrens of Mohenjo-daro, and fifty thousand other places all at once, a wild roller-coaster ride through space and time. It seemed to go on for centuries. But finally his head cleared and he looked about, blinking, realizing that



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the whole thing had taken only a moment. Cantilena still stood at his elbow. The other citizens in the room—fifteen, twenty of them—had scarcely moved. The strange little man with the celadon skin over by the far wall continued to stare at him.

"Well?" Cantilena asked. "What did you think?"

"Incredible."

"And very authentic. It's an actual New Chicagoan drug. The exact formula. Would you like another?"

"Not just yet," Phillips said uneasily. He swayed and had to struggle for his balance. Sniffing that stuff might not have been such a wise idea, he thought.

He had been in New Chicago a week, or perhaps it was two, and he was still suffering from the peculiar disorientation that that city always aroused in him. This was the fourth time that he had come here, and it had been the same every time. New Chicago was the only one of the reconstructed cities of this world that in its original incarnation had existed *after* his own era. To him it was an outpost of the incomprehensible future; to the citizens it was a quaint simulacrum of the archaeological past. That paradox left him aswirl with impossible confusions and tensions.

What had happened to *old* Chicago was of course impossible for him to discover. Vanished without a trace, that was clear; no Water Tower, no Marina City, no Hancock Center, no Tribune building, not a fragment, not an atom. But it was hopeless to ask any of the million-plus inhabitants of New Chicago about their city's predecessor. They were only temporaries; they knew no more than they had to know, and all that they had to know was how to go through the motions of whatever it was that they did by way of creating the illusion that this was a real city. They had no need of knowing ancient history.

Nor was he likely to find out anything from a citizen, of course. Citizens did not seem to bother much about scholarly matters. Phillips had no reason to think that the world was anything other than an amusement park to them. Somewhere, certainly, there had to be those who specialized in the serious study of the lost civilizations of the past—for how, otherwise, would these uncanny reconstructed cities be brought into being? "The planners," he had once heard Nissandra or Aramayne say, "are already deep into their Byzantium research." But who were the planners? He had no idea. For all he knew, they were the robots. Perhaps the robots were the real masters of this whole era, who created the cities not primarily for the sake of amusing the citizens but in their own diligent attempt to comprehend the life of the world that had passed away. A wild speculation, yes; but not without some plausibility, he thought.

He felt oppressed by the party gaiety all about him. "I need some air,"

he said to Cantilena, and headed toward the window. It was the merest crescent, but a breeze came through. He looked out at the strange city below.

New Chicago had nothing in common with the old one but its name. They had built it, at least, along the western shore of a large inland lake that might even be Lake Michigan, although when he had flown over it had seemed broader and less elongated than the lake he remembered. The city itself was a lacy fantasy of slender pastel-hued buildings rising at odd angles and linked by a webwork of gently undulating aerial bridges. The streets were long parentheses that touched the lake at their northern and southern ends and arched gracefully westward in the middle. Between each of the great boulevards ran a track for public transportation—sleek aquamarine bubble-vehicles gliding on soundless wheels—and flanking each of the tracks were lush strips of park. It was beautiful, astonishingly so, but insubstantial. The whole thing seemed to have been contrived from sunbeams and silk.

A soft voice beside him said, "Are you becoming ill?"

Phillips glanced around. The celadon man stood beside him: a compact, precise person, vaguely Oriental in appearance. His skin was of a curious gray-green hue like no skin Phillips had ever seen, and it was extraordinarily smooth in texture, as though he were made of fine porcelain.

He shook his head. "Just a little queasy," he said. "This city always scrambles me."

"I suppose it can be disconcerting," the little man replied. His tone was furry and veiled, the inflection strange. There was something feline about him. He seemed sinewy, unyielding, almost menacing. "Visitor, are you?"

Phillips studied him a moment. "Yes," he said.

"So am I, of course."

"Are you?"

"Indeed." The little man smiled. "What's your locus? Twentieth century? Twenty-first at the latest, I'd say."

"I'm from 1984. 1984 A.D."

Another smile, a self-satisfied one. "Not a bad guess, then." A brisk tilt of the head. "Y'ang-Yeovil."

"Pardon me?" Phillips said.

"Y'ang-Yeovil. It is my name. Formerly Colonel Y'ang-Yeovil of the Third Septentriad."

"Is that on some other planet?" asked Phillips, feeling a bit dazed.

"Oh, no, not at all," Y'ang-Yeovil said pleasantly. "This very world, I assure you. I am quite of human origin. Citizen of the Republic of Upper Han, native of the city of Port Ssu. And you—forgive me—your name—?"

"I'm sorry. Phillips. Charles Phillips. From New York City, once upon a time."

"Ah, New York!" Y'ang-Yeovil's face lit with a glimmer of recognition that quickly faded. "New York—New York—it was very famous, that I know—"

This is very strange, Phillips thought. He felt greater compassion for poor bewildered Francis Willoughby now. This man comes from a time so far beyond my own that he barely knows of New York—he must be a contemporary of the real New Chicago, in fact; I wonder whether he finds this version authentic—and yet to the citizens this Y'ang-Yeovil too is just a primitive, a curio out of antiquity—

"New York was the largest city of the United States of America," Phillips said.

"Of course. Yes. Very famous."

"But virtually forgotten by the time the Republic of Upper Han came into existence, I gather."

Y'ang-Yeovil said, looking uncomfortable, "There were disturbances between your time and mine. But by no means should you take from my words the impression that your city was—"

Sudden laughter resounded across the room. Five or six newcomers had arrived at the party. Phillips stared, gasped, gaped. Surely that was Stengard—and Aramayne beside him—and that other woman, half-hidden behind them—

"If you'll pardon me a moment—" Phillips said, turning abruptly away from Y'ang-Yeovil. "Please excuse me. Someone just coming in—a person I've been trying to find ever since—"

He hurried toward her.

"Gioia?" he called. "Gioia, it's me! Wait! Wait!"

Stengard was in the way. Aramayne, turning to take a handful of the little vapor-sniffers from Cantilena, blocked him also. Phillips pushed through them as though they were not there. Gioia, halfway out the door, halted and looked toward him like a frightened deer.

"Don't go," he said. He took her hand in his.

He was startled by her appearance. How long had it been since their strange parting on that night of mysteries in Chang-an? A year? A year and a half? So he believed. Or had he lost all track of time? Were his perceptions of the passing of the months in this world that unreliable? She seemed at least ten or fifteen years older. Maybe she really was; maybe the years had been passing for him here as in a dream, and he had never known it. She looked strained, faded, worn. Out of a thinner and strangely altered face her eyes blazed at him almost defiantly, as though saying, *See? See how ugly I have become?*

He said, "I've been hunting for you for—I don't know how long it's

been, Gioia. In Mohenjo, in Timbuctoo, now here. I want to be with you again."

"It isn't possible."

"Belilala explained everything to me in Mohenjo. I know that you're a short-timer—I know what that means, Gioia. But what of it? So you're beginning to age a little. So what? So you'll only have three or four hundred years, instead of forever. Don't you think I know what it means to be a short-timer? I'm just a simple ancient man of the twentieth century, remember? Sixty, seventy, eighty years is all we would get. You and I suffer from the same malady, Gioia. That's what drew you to me in the first place. I'm certain of that. That's why we belong with each other now. However much time we have, we can spend the rest of it together, don't you see?"

"You're the one who doesn't see, Charles," she said softly.

"Maybe. Maybe I still don't understand a damned thing about this place. Except that you and I—that I love you—that I think you love me—"

"I love you, yes. But you don't understand. It's precisely because I love you that you and I—you and I can't—"

With a despairing sigh she slid her hand free of his grasp. He reached for her again, but she shook him off and backed up quickly into the corridor.

"Gioia?"

"Please," she said. "No. I would never have come here if I knew you were here. Don't come after me. Please. Please."

She turned and fled.

He stood looking after her for a long moment. Cantilena and Aramayne appeared, and smiled at him as if nothing at all had happened. Cantilena offered him a vial of some sparkling amber fluid. He refused with a brusque gesture. Where do I go now, he wondered? What do I do? He wandered back into the party.

Y'ang-Yeovil glided to his side. "You are in great distress," the little man murmured.

Phillips glared. "Let me be."

"Perhaps I could be of some help."

"There's no help possible," said Phillips. He swung about and plucked one of the vials from a tray and gulped its contents. It made him feel as if there were two of him, standing on either side of Y'ang-Yeovil. He gulped another. Now there were four of him. "I'm in love with a citizen," he blurted. It seemed to him that he was speaking in chorus.

"Love. Ah. And does she love you?"

"So I thought. So I think. But she's a short-timer. Do you know what that means? She's not immortal like the others. She ages. She's beginning

to look old. And so she's been running away from me. She doesn't want me to see her changing. She thinks it'll disgust me, I suppose. I tried to remind her just now that I'm not immortal either, that she and I could grow old together, but she—"

"Oh, no," Y'ang-Yeovil said quietly. "Why do you think you will age? Have you grown any older in all the time you have been here?"

Phillips was nonplussed. "Of course I have. I—I—"

"Have you? Y'ang-Yeovil smiled. "Here. Look at yourself." He did something intricate with his fingers and a shimmering zone of mirror-like light appeared between them. Phillips stared at his reflection. A youthful face stared back at him. It was true, then. He had simply not thought about it. How many years had he spent in this world? The time had simply slipped by: a great deal of time, though he could not calculate how much. They did not seem to keep close count of it here, nor had he. But it must have been many years, he thought. All that endless travel up and down the globe—so many cities had come and gone—Rio, Rome, Asgård, those were the first three that came to mind—and there were others; he could hardly remember every one. Years. His face had not changed at all. Time had worked its harshness on Gioia, yes, but not on him.

"I don't understand," he said. "Why am I not aging?"

"Because you are not real," said Y'ang-Yeovil. "Are you unaware of that?"

Phillips blinked. "Not—real?"

"Did you think you were lifted bodily out of your own time?" the little man asked. "Ah, no, no, there is no way for them to do such a thing. We are not actual time travelers: not you, not I, not any of the visitors. I thought you were aware of that. But perhaps your era is too early for a proper understanding of these things. We are very cleverly done, my friend. We are ingenious constructs, marvelously stuffed with the thoughts and attitudes and events of our own times. We are their finest achievement, you know: far more complex even than one of these cities. We are a step beyond the temporaries—more than a step, a great deal more. They do only what they are instructed to do, and their range is very narrow. They are nothing but machines, really. Whereas we are autonomous. We move about by our own will; we think, we talk, we even, so it seems, fall in love. But we will not age. How could we age? We are not real. We are mere artificial webworks of mental responses. We are mere illusions, done so well that we deceive even ourselves. You did not know that? Indeed, you did not know?"

He was airborne, touching destination buttons at random. Somehow he found himself heading back toward Timbuctoo. *This city is closed.*

This is not a place any longer. It did not matter to him. Why should anything matter?

Fury and a choking sense of despair rose within him. I am software, Phillips thought. I am nothing but software.

Not real. Very cleverly done. An ingenious construct. A mere illusion.

No trace of Timbuctoo was visible from the air. He landed anyway. The gray sandy earth was smooth, unturned, as though there had never been anything there. A few robots were still about, handling whatever final chores were required in the shutting-down of a city. Two of them scuttled up to him. Huge bland gleaming silver-skinned insects, not friendly.

"There is no city here," they said. "This is not a permissible place."

"Permissible by whom?"

"There is no reason for you to be here."

"There's no reason for me to be anywhere," Phillips said. The robots stirred, made uneasy humming sounds and ominous clicks, waved their antennae about. They seem troubled, he thought. They seem to dislike my attitude. Perhaps I run some risk of being taken off to the home for unruly software for debugging. "I'm leaving now," he told them. "Thank you. Thank you very much." He backed away from them and climbed into his flutterflitter. He touched more destination buttons.

We move about by our own will. We think, we talk, we even fall in love.

He landed in Chang-an. This time there was no reception committee waiting for him at the Gate of Brilliant Virtue. The city seemed larger and more resplendent: new pagodas, new palaces. It felt like winter: a chilly cutting wind was blowing. The sky was cloudless and dazzlingly bright. At the steps of the Silver Terrace he encountered Francis Willoughby, a great hulking figure in magnificent brocaded robes, with two dainty little temporaries, pretty as jade statuettes, engulfed in his arms. "Miracles and wonders! The silly lunatic fellow is here too!" Willoughby roared. "Look, look, we are come to far Cathay, you and I!"

We are nowhere, Phillips thought. *We are mere illusions, done so well that we deceive even ourselves.*

To Willoughby he said, "You look like an emperor in those robes, Francis."

"Aye, like Prester John!" Willoughby cried. "Like Tamburlaine himself! Aye, am I not majestic?" He slapped Phillips gaily on the shoulder, a rough playful poke that spun him halfway about, coughing and wheezing. "We flew in the air, as the eagles do, as the demons do, as the angels do! Soared like angels! Like angels!" He came close, looming over Phillips. "I would have gone to England, but the wench Belilala said there was an enchantment on me that would keep me from England just now; and so we voyaged to Cathay. Tell me this, fellow, will you go witness for me

when we see England again? Swear that all that has befallen us did in truth befall? For I fear they will say I am as mad as Marco Polo, when I tell them of flying to Cathay."

"One madman backing another?" Phillips asked. "What can I tell you? You still think you'll reach England, do you?" Rage rose to the surface in him, bubbling hot. "Ah, Francis, Francis, do you know your Shakespeare? Did you go to the plays? We aren't real. *We aren't real*. We are such stuff as dreams are made on, the two of us. That's all we are. O brave new world! What England? Where? There's no England. There's no Francis Willoughby. There's no Charles Phillips. What we are is—"

"Let him be, Charles," a cool voice cut in.

He turned. Belilala, in the robes of an empress, coming down the steps of the Silver Terrace.

"I know the truth," he said bitterly. "Y'ang-Yeovil told me. The visitor from the twenty-fifth century. I saw him in New Chicago."

"Did you see Gioia there too?" Belilala asked.

"Briefly. She looks much older."

"Yes. I know. She was here recently."

"And has gone on, I suppose?"

"To Mohenjo again, yes. Go after her, Charles. Leave poor Francis alone. I told her to wait for you. I told her that she needs you, and you need her."

"Very kind of you. But what good is it, Belilala? I don't even exist. And she's going to die."

"You exist. How can you doubt that you exist? You feel, don't you? You suffer. You love. You love Gioia: is that not so? And you are loved by Gioia. Would Gioia love what is not real?"

"You think she loves me?"

"I know she does. Go to her, Charles. Go. I told her to wait for you in Mohenjo."

Phillips nodded numbly. What was there to lose?

"Go to her," said Belilala again. "Now."

"Yes," Phillips said. "I'll go now." He turned to Willoughby. "If ever we meet in London, friend, I'll testify for you. Fear nothing. All will be well, Francis."

He left them and set his course for Mohenjo-daro, half expecting to find the robots already tearing it down. Mohenjo-daro was still there, no lovelier than before. He went to the baths, thinking he might find Gioia there. She was not; but he came upon Nissandra, Stengard, Fenimon. "She has gone to Alexandria," Fenimon told him. "She wants to see it one last time, before they close it."

"They're almost ready to open Constantinople," Stengard explained. "The capital of Byzantium, you know, the great city by the Golden Horn."

They'll take Alexandria away, you understand, when Byzantium opens. They say it's going to be marvelous. We'll see you there for the opening, naturally?"

"Naturally," Phillips said.

He flew to Alexandria. He felt lost and weary. All this is hopeless folly, he told himself. I am nothing but a puppet jerking about on its strings. But somewhere above the shining breast of the Arabian Sea the deeper implications of something that Belilala had said to him started to sink in, and he felt his bitterness, his rage, his despair, all suddenly beginning to leave him. *You exist. How can you doubt that you exist? Would Gioia love what is not real?* Of course. Of course. Y'ang-Yeovil had been wrong: visitors were something more than mere illusions. Indeed Y'ang-Yeovil had voiced the truth of their condition without understanding what he was really saying: *We think, we talk, we fall in love.* Yes. That was the heart of the situation. The visitors might be artificial, but they were not unreal. Belilala had been trying to tell him that just the other night. *You suffer. You love. You love Gioia. Would Gioia love what is not real?* Surely he was real, or at any rate real enough. What he was was something strange, something that would probably have been all but incomprehensible to the twentieth-century people whom he had been designed to simulate. But that did not mean that he was unreal. Did one have to be of woman born to be real? No. No. No. His kind of reality was a sufficient reality. He had no need to be ashamed of it. And, understanding that, he understood that Gioia did not need to grow old and die. There was a way by which she could be saved, if only she would embrace it. If only she would.

When he landed in Alexandria he went immediately to the hotel on the slopes of the Paneium where they had stayed on their first visit, so very long ago; and there she was, sitting quietly on a patio with a view of the harbor and the Lighthouse. There was something calm and resigned about the way she sat. She had given up. She did not even have the strength to flee from him any longer.

"Gioia," he said gently.

She looked older than she had in New Chicago. Her face was drawn and sallow and her eyes seemed sunken; and she was not even bothering these days to deal with the white strands that stood out in stark contrast against the darkness of her hair. He sat down beside her and put his hand over hers, and looked out toward the obelisks, the palaces, the temples, the Lighthouse. At length he said, "I know what I really am, now."

"Do you, Charles?" She sounded very far away.

"In my era we called it software. All I am is a set of commands, re-

sponses, cross-references, operating some sort of artificial body. It's infinitely better software than we could have imagined. But we were only just beginning to learn how, after all. They pumped me full of twentieth-century reflexes. The right moods, the right appetites, the right irrationalities, the right sort of combativeness. Somebody knows a lot about what it was like to be a twentieth-century man. They did a good job with Willoughby, too, all that Elizabethan rhetoric and swagger. And I suppose they got Yang-Yeovil right. *He* seems to think so: who better to judge? The twenty-fifth century, the Republic of Upper Han, people with gray-green skin, half Chinese and half Martian for all I know. *Somebody* knows. Somebody here is very good at programming, Gioia."

She was not looking at him.

"I feel frightened, Charles," she said in that same distant way.

"Of me? Of the things I'm saying?"

"No, not of you. Don't you see what has happened to me?"

"I see you. There are changes."

"I lived a long time wondering when the changes would begin. I thought maybe they wouldn't, not really. Who wants to believe they'll get old? But it started when we were in Alexandria that first time. In Chang-an it got much worse. And now—now—"

He said abruptly, "Stengard tells me they'll be opening Constantinople very soon."

"So?"

"Don't you want to be there when it opens?"

"I'm becoming old and ugly, Charles."

"We'll go to Constantinople together. We'll leave tomorrow, eh? What do you say? We'll charter a boat. It's a quick little hop, right across the Mediterranean. Sailing to Byzantium! There was a poem, you know, in my time. Not forgotten, I guess, because they've programmed it into me. All these thousands of years, and someone still remembers old Yeats. *The young in one another's arms, birds in the trees.* Come with me to Byzantium, Gioia."

She shrugged. "Looking like this? Getting more hideous every hour? While *they* stay young forever? While *you*—" She faltered; her voice cracked; she fell silent.

"Finish the sentence, Gioia."

"Please. Let me alone."

"You were going to say, 'While *you* stay young forever too, Charles,' isn't that it? You knew all along that I was never going to change. I didn't know that, but you did."

"Yes. I knew. I pretended that it wasn't true—that as I aged, you'd age too. It was very foolish of me. In Chang-an, when I first began to see the real signs of it—that was when I realized I couldn't stay with you

any longer. Because I'd look at you, always young, always remaining the same age, and I'd look at myself, and—" She gestured, palms upward. "So I gave you to Belilala and ran away."

"All so unnecessary, Gioia."

"I didn't think it was."

"But you don't have to grow old. Not if you don't want to!"

"Don't be cruel, Charles," she said tonelessly. "There's no way of escaping what I have."

"But there is," he said.

"You know nothing about these things."

"Not very much, no," he said. "But I see how it can be done. Maybe it's a primitive simple-minded twentieth-century sort of solution, but I think it ought to work. I've been playing with the idea ever since I left Mohenjo. Tell me this, Gioia: Why can't you go to them, to the programmers, to the artificers, the planners, whoever they are, the ones who create the cities and the temporaries and the visitors. And have yourself made into something like me!"

She looked up, startled. "What are you saying?"

"They can cobble up a twentieth-century man out of nothing more than fragmentary records and make him plausible, can't they? Or an Elizabethan, or anyone else of any era at all, and he's authentic, he's convincing. So why couldn't they do an even better job with you? Produce a Gioia so real that even Gioia can't tell the difference? But a Gioia that will never age—a Gioia-construct, a Gioia-program, a visitor-Gioia! Why not? Tell me why not, Gioia."

She was trembling. "I've never heard of doing any such thing!"

"But don't you think it's possible?"

"How would I know?"

"Of course it's possible. If they can create visitors, they can take a citizen and duplicate her in such a way that—"

"It's never been done. I'm sure of it. I can't imagine any citizen agreeing to any such thing. To give up the body—to let yourself be turned into—into—"

She shook her head, but it seemed to be a gesture of astonishment as much as of negation.

He said, "Sure. To give up the body. Your natural body, your aging, shrinking, deteriorating short-timer body. What's so awful about that?"

She was very pale. "This is craziness, Charles. I don't want to talk about it any more."

"It doesn't sound crazy to me."

"You can't possibly understand."

"Can't I? I can certainly understand being afraid to die. I don't have a lot of trouble understanding what it's like to be one of the few aging

people in a world where nobody grows old. What I can't understand is why you aren't even willing to consider the possibility that—"

"No," she said. "I tell you, it's crazy. They'd laugh at me."

"Who?"

"All of my friends. Hawk, Stengard, Aramayne—" Once again she would not look at him. "They can be very cruel, without even realizing it. They despise anything that seems ungraceful to them, anything sweaty and desperate and cowardly. Citizens don't do sweaty things, Charles. And that's how this will seem. Assuming it can be done at all. They'll be terribly patronizing. Oh, they'll be sweet to me, yes, dear Gioia, how wonderful for you, Gioia, but when I turn my back they'll laugh. They'll say the most wicked things about me. I couldn't bear that."

"They can afford to laugh," Phillips said. "It's easy to be brave and cool about dying when you know you're going to live forever. How very fine for them; but why should you be the only one to grow old and die? And they won't laugh, anyway. They're not as cruel as you think. Shallow, maybe, but not cruel. They'll be glad that you've found a way to save yourself. At the very least, they won't have to feel guilty about you any longer, and that's bound to please them. You can—"

"Stop it," she said.

She rose, walked to the railing of the patio, stared out toward the sea. He came up behind her. Red sails in the harbor, sunlight glittering along the sides of the Lighthouse, the palaces of the Ptolemies stark white against the sky. Lightly he rested his hand on her shoulder. She twitched as if to pull away from him, but remained where she was.

"Then I have another idea," he said quietly. "If you won't go to the planners, I will. Reprogram me, I'll say. Fix things so that I start to age at the same rate you do. It'll be more authentic, anyway, if I'm supposed to be playing the part of a twentieth-century man. Over the years I'll very gradually get some lines in my face, my hair will turn gray, I'll walk a little more slowly—we'll grow old together, Gioia. To hell with your lovely immortal friends. We'll have each other. We won't need them."

She swung around. Her eyes were wide with horror.

"Are you serious, Charles?"

"Of course."

"No," she murmured. "No. Everything you've said to me today is monstrous nonsense. Don't you realize that?"

He reached for her hand and enclosed her fingertips in his. "All I'm trying to do is find some way for you and me to—"

"Don't say any more," she said. "Please." Quickly, as though drawing back from a suddenly flaring flame, she tugged her fingers free of his and put her hand behind her. Though his face was just inches from hers

he felt an immense chasm opening between them. They stared at one another for a moment; then she moved deftly to his left, darted around him, and ran from the patio.

Stunned, he watched her go, down the long marble corridor and out of sight. It was folly to give pursuit, he thought. She was lost to him: that was clear, that was beyond any question. She was terrified of him. Why cause her even more anguish? But somehow he found himself running through the halls of the hotel, along the winding garden path, into the cool green groves of the Paneium. He thought he saw her on the portico of Hadrian's palace, but when he got there the echoing stone halls were empty. To a temporary that was sweeping the steps he said, "Did you see a woman come this way?" A blank sullen stare was his only answer.

Phillips cursed and turned away.

"Gioia?" he called. "Wait! Come back!"

Was that her, going into the Library? He rushed past the startled mumbling librarians and sped through the stacks, peering beyond the mounds of double-handled scrolls into the shadowy corridors. "Gioia? Gioia!" It was a descration, bellowing like that in this quiet place. He scarcely cared.

Emerging by a side door, he loped down to the harbor. The Lighthouse! Terror enfolded him. She might already be a hundred steps up that ramp, heading for the parapet from which she meant to fling herself into the sea. Scattering citizens and temporaries as if they were straws, he ran within. Up he went, never pausing for breath, though his synthetic lungs were screaming for respite, his ingeniously designed heart was desperately pounding. On the first balcony he imagined he caught a glimpse of her, but he circled it without finding her. Onward, upward. He went to the top, to the beacon chamber itself: no Gioia. Had she jumped? Had she gone down one ramp while he was ascending the other? He clung to the rim and looked out, down, searching the base of the Lighthouse, the rocks offshore, the causeway. No Gioia. I will find her somewhere, he thought. I will keep going until I find her. He went running down the ramp, calling her name. He reached ground level and sprinted back toward the center of town. Where next? The temple of Poseidon? The tomb of Cleopatra?

He paused in the middle of Canopus Street, groggy and dazed.

"Charles?" she said.

"Where are you?"

"Right here. Beside you." She seemed to materialize from the air. Her face was unflushed, her robe bore no trace of perspiration. Had he been chasing a phantom through the city? She came to him and took his hand,

and said, softly, tenderly, "Were you really serious, about having them make you age?"

"If there's no other way, yes."

"The other way is so frightening, Charles."

"Is it?"

"You can't understand how much."

"More frightening than growing old? Than dying?"

"I don't know," she said. "I suppose not. The only thing I'm sure of is that I don't want you to get old, Charles."

"But I won't have to. Will I?" He stared at her.

"No," she said. "You won't have to. Neither of us will."

Phillips smiled. "We should get away from here," he said after a while. "Let's go across to Byzantium, yes, Gioia? We'll show up in Constantinople for the opening. Your friends will be there. We'll tell them what you've decided to do. They'll know how to arrange it. Someone will."

"It sounds so strange," said Gioia. "To turn myself into—into a visitor? A visitor in my own world?"

"That's what you've always been, though."

"I suppose. In a way. But at least I've been *real* up to now."

"Whereas I'm not?"

"Are you, Charles?"

"Yes. Just as real as you. I was angry at first, when I found out the truth about myself. But I came to accept it. Somewhere between Mohenjo and here, I came to see that it was all right to be what I am: that I perceive things, I form ideas, I draw conclusions. I am very well designed, Gioia. I can't tell the difference between being what I am and being completely alive, and to me that's being real enough. I think, I feel, I experience joy and pain. I'm as real as I need to be. And you will be too. You'll never stop being Gioia, you know. It's only your body that you'll cast away, the body that played such a terrible joke on you anyway." He brushed her cheek with his hand. "It was all said for us before, long ago:

*Once out of nature I shall never take
My bodily form from any natural thing,
But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake—"*

"Is that the same poem?" she asked.

"The same poem, yes. The ancient poem that isn't quite forgotten yet."

"Finish it, Charles."

*—"Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come."*

"How beautiful. What does it mean?"

"That it isn't necessary to be mortal. That we can allow ourselves to be gathered into the artifice of eternity, that we can be transformed, that we can move on beyond the flesh. Yeats didn't mean it in quite the way I do—he wouldn't have begun to comprehend what we're talking about, not a word of it—and yet, and yet—the underlying truth is the same. Live, Gioia! With me!" He turned to her and saw color coming into her pallid cheeks. "It does make sense, what I'm suggesting, doesn't it? You'll attempt it, won't you? Whoever makes the visitors can be induced to remake you. Right? What do you think: can they, Gioia?"

She nodded in a barely perceptible way. "I think so," she said faintly. "It's very strange. But I think it ought to be possible. Why not, Charles? Why not?"

"Yes," he said. "Why not?"

In the morning they hired a vessel in the harbor, a low sleek pirogue with a blood-red sail, skippered by a rascally-looking temporary whose smile was irresistible. Phillips shaded his eyes and peered northward across the sea. He thought he could almost make out the shape of the great city sprawling on its seven hills, Constantine's New Rome beside the Golden Horn, the mighty dome of Hagia Sophia, the somber walls of the citadel, the palaces and churches, the Hippodrome, Christ in glory rising above all else in brilliant mosaic streaming with light.

"Byzantium," Phillips said. "Take us there the shortest and quickest way."

"It is my pleasure," said the boatman with unexpected grace.

Gioia smiled. He had not seen her looking so vibrantly alive since the night of the imperial feast in Chang-an. He reached for her hand—her slender fingers were quivering lightly—and helped her into the boat. ●



ON BOOKS

by Baird Searles

Gilgamesh the King

By Robert Silverberg

Arbor House, \$16.95

The Gate of Worlds

By Robert Silverberg

Tor, \$2.95 (paper)

Two atypical volumes from Robert Silverberg have recently appeared, if the word "atypical" can be used for that writer who has been through several chameleon-like changes in his longish career. *Gilgamesh the King* is a new novel; *Gate of Worlds* was published in hardcover some seventeen years ago, but has never before been paperbacked. Silverberg is something of a scholar of various eras of history, and both these books deal with history, but in very different ways; and they're both quite different from his recent work, which has been mostly devoted to the hugely popular stories about Majipoor and Lord Valentine.

The older *Gate of Worlds* is pretty superficial stuff—which doesn't mean it isn't good fun on a simple level. It's devoted to the picaresque adventures of a young man who leaves his impoverished and primitive homeland to seek his fame and fortune serving the king of a richer and more civilized country. He rescues a wealthy merchant

from thieves; he gets involved with a renegade courtier and goes off with him to carve a small kingdom out of the ill-guarded border reaches of the Empire; when this expedition ends in disaster, he finds himself among the primitive peoples beyond the Empire's reach and entangles himself with their battles and politics, not to mention a chief's daughter who loves Shakespeare in the Bard's original language, Turkish.

Turkish?

Yes, Turkish—that's the *not-so-simple* part of the book. The background is a meticulously worked out alternate universe. The year is 1985 A.D., but it sure ain't *our* 1985 A.D.; seems that the Black Death did in *three-quarters* of the population of Europe in the 14th century instead of a mere one-quarter. Therefore Europe did *not* dominate the world scene from 1500; the Turks, in fact, conquered it about then. A master writer named Shakespeare *did* live in England, but he wrote in the language of the conquerors (unwillingly, it is noted, and he'd much rather be writing about his own country's history than turning out plays such as *Osman the Great*).

This alternate universe tackles

one of the great unanswerable questions of our own history. What would the pre-Columbian civilizations of the Americas have become if the Europeans had not wiped them out? Pre-Columbian culture is one of Silverberg's areas of expertise, and he postulates intriguingly the rise of the Aztecs and Incas to world power. It is, in fact, for the glittering court of Montezuma XII that the young Englishman, Dan Beauchamp, leaves his home in New Istanbul (London).

Silverberg injects a lot of fascinating detail into the alternative 500 years of this world's history, and even though the story may be featherweight, the background is far from it, and a particular treat for history buffs.

Silverberg's *Gilgamesh the King* takes us back 4500 years and to the other side of the globe.

The Sumerian demigod Gilgamesh could be considered the first superhero; we know about him from the world's oldest comic, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (that analogy would hold up better if it had been written in hieroglyphics instead of cuneiform, but let it ride), considered to be the prime contender for mankind's first work of literature. Silverberg points out in an "Afterword" to his novel that there was an historical Gilgamesh who ruled in Sumer about 2500 B.C., and he had given us that worthy's biography as told by himself, which incorporates the incidents from the mythical epic into the historical figure's life. In effect Silverberg

defantasizes myth here; all the fantastical elements of Gilgamesh's story—battles with demons, encounters with scorpion-men, the search for the immortal survivor of Sumeria's flood (their Noah, in fact)—are given possible rational explanations, though Gilgamesh still views many of them as supernatural.

The major forces in Gilgamesh's life are two: his deep friendship with the beast-man Enkidu (which has raised some eyebrows over the centuries, since it is presented in the David/Jonathan tradition of male love; Silverberg's Gilgamesh squashes that scandalous rumor in no uncertain terms) and his love-hate relationship with the priestess of Inanna (whom we know better as Ishtar), supposedly the goddess incarnate. The two inevitably conflict, and Inanna causes Enkidu's death, which is the reason for the hero king's search for the Sumerian Noah, to discover from him the secret of immortality.

Silverberg has pulled off a real tour de force here, following the epic legend neatly while evoking the reality of the primitive Sumerian culture. But maybe he has attempted the impossible; the story is heavy going at times, and perhaps it's because of the very primeval nature of the myth and the culture. From what we know of it, the civilization of the city states of Sumer was pretty basic, devoted to feasting, sex, warfare, and the gods (who were a pretty basic lot themselves, devoted to feasting, sex, and

warfare). Even the original version of the lovely legend of Ishtar going to Hell to rescue her lover from death, as Gilgamesh knows it, is that Inanna really went to take over from her sister as queen of the place, by force if necessary, and when she was ambushed, sold her lover down the river in her own place. That's one reason that Gilgamesh sensibly wants to steer clear of her earthly incarnation.

So there's not much room for romanticism or even much humanity here (as opposed to the more sophisticated Greek legends, for instance, which leave endless room for complex human emotions), and Silverberg may have undermined himself by having the courage not to inject any. Consequently Gilgamesh does come over as the stereotypical superhero—dumb, vain, and always ready to sock somebody; he's the product of an adolescent culture. A comics version of the epic would probably go over better than Silverberg's intelligent try.

Emergence

By David R. Palmer

Bantam, \$2.95 (paper)

Is a good book. Hard to get into. Written in a kind of transcribed shorthand. Reads something like this all way through. Infuriating for ten pages, then seems intelligible.

First-person story. First page realize person is in bomb shelter. Survived holocaust. Describes self as genius, speed reader. Comes as

shock when revealed to be eleven-year-old girl.

Girl Candy has advantages. Daddy high mucky-muck in government medical circles, though lives in Wisconsin. Built super duper survival shelter, all latest conveniences. Candy not quite homo sap; mutant strain, highly intelligent, totally immune to disease. Estimate 150,000 in continental U.S.

Candy alone save for pet bird when attack hits. Holocaust accomplished non-destructively to property with introduction of harmless virus; special warheads trigger reaction by radiation, virus turns deadly. Kills all population but Candy's kind.

Story devoted to Candy's search for own kind across empty country. Runs into various; some nice, some not so nice. Story does not dwell on blood, loot, and rape. Highly commendable.

Suspense involves fact that some of *homo post hominem* (term invented for mutant strain) seem to have been organized. Candy finds clues that all such have evacuated to some gathering place. Location obviously top secret. Why?

For that matter, where?

Don't want to spoil surprises; simply note things get very complicated. Turns out all of enemy *not* dead in reprisal strike, as supposed. Enough said.

Candy engaging character. Reminiscent of Heinlein's Podkayne, but not quite so smart ass (younger,

maybe?). Whole book brings early Heinlein to mind in various ways.

Bird is good character, too. Hyacinthine macaw, name of Terry.

Wonder if novel written in shorthand? Wonder if Lou Aronica at Bantam had to transcribe? Wonder if publisher will use nice quotes in same style from this review on second edition?

Dubious.

Viriconium Nights

By M. John Harrison

Ace, \$2.75 (paper)

OK, back to real sentences again. Quite a relief—writing in shorthandese not easy. Not easy to break, either. Let's see—it goes "subject, predicate, object, etc." Oh, well, I'll get the hang of it again.

Speaking of sentences, one of the great sentence writers in the field is M. John Harrison. Witness this example from his recent book of short stories, *Viriconium Nights*. "Deep in the Marsh, the path wound tortuously between umber iron bogs, albescent quicksands of aluminum and magnesium oxides, and sumps of cuprous blue or permanganate mauve fed by slow gelid streams and fringed by silver reeds."

The well-read reader will perhaps be reminded of the work of Gene Wolfe, as am I. This not only applies to the immediate sentence-by-sentence style, but the general sensibility as well—the baroque settings of a far future of technology so weird it becomes magic, and characters equally weird and eccentric. Harrison's oft-revisited city,

Viriconium, would fit nicely on Wolfe's Urth, or more fairly, since the Harrison came first, Urth would be a suitable setting for Viriconium.

Which, of course, raises the interesting question of why Wolfe has achieved such immense popularity, while Harrison's has barely moved beyond cult status. Those of us who have admired Harrison's work for nearly 20 years can but wonder, with a touch of resentment. (Not that Wolfe has become so popular, but that Harrison has not—they are both formidable talents.)

Is it that Harrison is English (no prejudice implied—simple propinquity can be an advantage)? Or is it the luck and logistics of publishing (both began writing at about the same time)? Or is it the subtler differences, since despite the obvious similarities they are equally individual voices?

Harrison's new book is a collection of short stories revolving around his eternal city, Viriconium, which we first met in *The Pastel City*, then saw saved from disaster (enormous insects from the bordering wastelands) at another point of time in *A Storm of Wings* and beset with plague in *The Floating Gods*.

The short stories in *Viriconium Nights* also range in time, though being Viriconium, there are certain constants (which do not necessarily include the city's name). There is the Bistro Californium and the Rue Serpolet and the Mar-

garethstrasse. We meet some old acquaintances, too, such as Lord tegeus-Cromis, "sometime soldier and sophisticate . . . who imagined himself a better poet than swordsman."

In "Viriconium Knights" (not the title story, you notice), the hired bravo, Retz, defies his employer, Mammy Vooley, the city's Queen, and takes refuge with a mysterious old man whose tapestry reveals the past (?) in which Retz is Lord Cromis (shades of Elric!). In "The Lamia and Lord Cromis," tegeus-Cromis in person confronts the Sixth Beast of Viriconium which has haunted his family for generations, and with the aid of the lusty Dissolution Kahn and the revolting dwarf, Rotgob, brings the matter to a curious end.

"In Viriconium," the collection's longest story, tells of a pestilence that hits the city, and the attempts of Ashlyme, the portrait painter, to save his beloved Audsley King from its toils (it's a peculiar, but quite deadly, sort of contagion). If this sounds familiar to Harrison readers, the story is apparently a preliminary version of *The Floating Gods*.

So, Wolfelings, take a chance on Harrison. It's a good bet that he'll be your cup of tea.

Venus Plus X

By Theodore Sturgeon
Bluejay, \$7.95 (paper)

Hermaphrodites have been in SF ever since Ursula Le Guin's trailblazing and extraordinary *The*

Left Hand of Darkness extrapolated a physically bi-sexual society (technically not hermaphroditic, since the sexual characteristics were not present at the same time in its members—so *there*, nitpickers!). The idea has been well and ill handled since then; what is often forgotten is that the Old Master Theodore Sturgeon did a novel on the theme well ahead of Le Guin. His *Venus Plus X* was published in 1960, nine years before the Le Guin work, and those were a long nine years indeed, since the sexual revolution occurred during them.

There's a curiously stiff quality to the novel; it's not the quirkily styled kind of thing Sturgeon usually does, perhaps because he was writing in the uptight '50s. (Rumor had it that Sturgeon was out to write a story about every sexual tabu he could think of, and it did take some courage to do that sort of thing then, hard to believe in this day of anything goes.) Whatever the reason, it's obvious that the author has an axe to grind; it's so obvious that it makes *Left Hand* (which is hardly without a Message itself) seem like a mindless action thriller.

Sturgeon uses the old device of the man from our time (one Charlie Johns) waking in a strange environment. His hosts, the Ledom, inform him that he is in the future, that mankind is dead, and that they (the Ledom) have inherited the ravaged planet, though there are very few of them as yet. Charlie also, in time, learns that the Ledom

are true hermaphrodites, having the equipment of both sexes, as well as that for giving birth (hard to buy gifts for, since they are truly men who have everything, one might say).

Charlie's exploration of this culture is counterpointed with the day to day lives of a contemporary couple, in which Sturgeon pointedly emphasizes the sexual stupidity of mid-century America, as well as the increasing lack of differentiation between the sexes—he minds the baby, does some of the cooking, and wears bikini briefs; she goes bowling, thinks up slogans for his ad campaigns, and wears pants and T-shirts. This was a Big Deal back then, an inevitable reaction to the bellicose machismo of World War II.

Not exactly subtle, any of it. But it's still fascinating, because it's by Sturgeon. The society of the Ledom is intriguing, and you are happy in the old-fashioned role of the reader being shown around a futuristic and alien culture. And Sturgeon's ideas are sometimes startlingly ahead of their time ("... suppose Karen and Davy grow up without this big fat Thing you read about, the father image, the mother image; all like that.") and sometimes interestingly askew from the philosophy of equality that developed in the decade after the book was written.

As for the lack of story line, that is almost made up for by a socko surprise ending, the details of which wild hermaphrodites couldn't drag

out of me. There *might* be a clue hidden in Sturgeon's nomenclature, but I'm not dead sure of that, and that's all that will be said.

It's good that *Venus Plus X* is again available; no matter what the title, whatever Sturgeon puts out is caviar.

Shoptalk... Wa-a-a-y back in 1950, Jack Vance's first book was published (it cost a quarter). Called *The Dying Earth*, it was not quite like anything we'd ever read before in the field, with its outrageous combination of science fiction and fantasy, of magic and technology. Over the years, Vance has favored us with other stories in the same setting, and now, thirty-five years later, there's a *new Dying Earth* novel! The title is *Rhialto, the Marvelous* (Baen Books, \$12.95)... A treat for McCaffreyites; the devotees of Queen Anne will greet with joy *The Atlas of Pern* by Karen Wynn Fonstad, which is obviously a geography of the Dragon Planet with lots of satisfying maps and a gazetteer and all those things beloved of the science fictional mind. Could this be called a work of Pernography? If so, it has definite redeeming social value (Del Rey, \$9.95).

Scratch a large percentage of SF and fantasy aficionados and you'll find a childhood devotion to the Oz books. To those who don't fall into that category, let it be known that Oz was not simply *The Wizard of...*; it was a series that ran to over 30 volumes and was arguably

the first fantasy series to be devoted to adventures by a myriad characters in a created kingdom (read world), thereby setting a pattern followed by any number of authors today. The Oz series had been for the most part unavailable for some time ("Unrealistic!" said the librarians). Then the first fourteen (those by L. Frank Baum, the creator of Oz) were published in paperback a few years back, to be greeted in this and other quarters with great joy. But that left about twenty, mostly by Ruth Plumly Thompson, still in limbo, and those were the ones that had been thoroughly unavailable for decades (and commanding staggering prices in the rare book field, incidentally). Now we have it on good authority that they may well be reappearing soon, and one can only say, "About time!" There are such treats in store for those who have never been able to find these rare volumes as *The Silver Princess in Oz* (the adventures of Planetty, Princess of Another Planet, and Thun, her Thunder Colt), *The Yellow Knight of Oz* (in which Ozma's knight, Sir Hokus, goes on a quest to find his enchanted origins), and *Handy Mandy in Oz* (concerning the manner in which the nine-armed goat girl from Mt. Mern saves the Emerald City from its perpetual nemesis, Ruggedo of the Rocks, ex-King of the Gnomes).

The collector's item of the decade has appeared. Get this: it's a boxed, numbered, autographed set of the four volumes of Julian May's bril-

liant *Saga of Pliocene Exile*, all first editions, which also includes a hardcover guide to the myriad people and places of the many-colored land, *The Pliocene Companion* by Ms. May, and a specially designed bookplate by Steven Fabian. Even for non-collectors, it's a prize, and what an extraordinary gift it would make! (Houghton-Mifflin, \$85; the *Companion* is available separately at \$13.95).

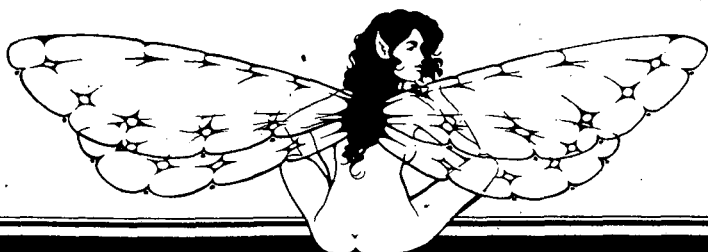
The second volume of David Gerrold's series, "The War Against the Chtorr" has appeared; titled *A Day For Damnation*, it's as rip-roaring and Heinleinesque (in the very best sense) as the first. The series now looks to be five novels, concerning, as those who read *A Matter For Men* know, the appearance of a complete and deadly alien ecological chain (topped by giant, man-eating orange-pink caterpillars) on an Earth of the near future weakened already by plague. It's an extended puzzle novel—Where do they come from? What are they? How can humanity fight them? Gerrold has set things up so brilliantly that he better have some good answers in the last volume (somehow I think he will). The new novel adds some ingredients and a few more hair-raising situations (including the very original one of trapping the hero in a grounded airplane buried deep in acres of pink cotton candy—not as cute a pickle as it sounds). (Timescape, \$6.95, paper) . . . And speaking of five-volume sets, finally the finale to David Eddings' "The Belgariad," proba-

bly the most diverting light and high fantasy series of the 1980s. It's *Enchanter's End Game* (Del Rey, \$3.50).

And finally, one of those rare anthologies that are actually original enough to be worth noting. *Kindred Spirits* is an anthology of gay and lesbian science fiction stories (by Gerrold, Joanna Russ, Robert Silverberg, Elizabeth A. Lynn, and Edgar Pangborn, among others) edited by Jeffrey M. Elliot (Alyson, \$6.95).

Recent publications from those associated with this magazine include: *Opus 300* by Isaac Asimov (Houghton Mifflin, \$17.95); *Isaac Asimov's Wonderful World of Science Fiction #3: Supermen* edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg & Charles Waugh (NAL, \$3.50, paper).

Books to be considered for review in this column should be submitted to Baird Searles, c/o The Science Fiction Shop, 56 8th Ave., New York, N.Y. 10014. ●



NEXT ISSUE

Our March issue is packed with excellent stories. We have a complicated mystery by Connie Willis, set amidst an archaeological expedition on an ancient planet. Back here on Earth, we have a fascinating novella by Wolfgang Jeschke which traverses a vibrant North Africa after the collapse of the rest of the world. You'll find delightful pieces by Thomas Wylde, Pete Hamill, and others as well, so pick up your copy on February 12, 1985.



DOPPLER EFFECTS

For Karol

Out among the galaxies I saw
the firewood to empty my head
of small angers, of the raw red
shifts in the heart's velocities.
Through the kitchen door, a night
figure against a yolk-yellow core
of light, you clank stainless steel
and jars. Bright stars above burn
farther apart; it often feels
so similar on our heavenly charts.
Happily, our universe is not steady
state: with expansion comes return.
We look forward to the dawn's blue
shift—awake in each other's drift
of accreted arms and dew, and ready
for each and every egg-stained plate.

—Robert Frazier

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

The holiday lull in con(vention) activity is ending, and the Spring con season is about to start. Plan now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a later, longer list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped #10 (long) envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code & number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send an SASE when writing cons. When phoning cons, give your name and reason for calling first off. Look for me at cons behind the iridescent badge reading "Filthy Pierre."

JANUARY, 1985

18-20—ChattaCon. For info, write: **Box 961, Hixson TN 37343.** Or phone: **(703) 273-6111** (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in: Chattanooga TN (if city omitted, same as in address) at the Read House Hotel. Guests will include: C. J. ("Downbelow Station") Cherryh, Wilson Arthur (Bob) Tucker, Tim Zahn. "Pie-a-thon II" is scheduled. This is traditionally the year's first con.

18-20—RustyCon. SeaTac Hyatt Hotel, Seattle WA. Gordon Eklund, Kevin Johnson, Steve Fahnestalk.

26-27—ChimeraCon. Carolina Union, Univ. of NC, Chapel Hill NC. (919) 967-3049. Karl Edward Wagner, Manly Wade Wellman, Frances Garfield, Allen Wold, David Drake, M. A. Foster, Walter Meyers.

FEBRUARY, 1985

1-4—Corflu, Box 590712, San Francisco CA 94159. Napa CA. Suzanne (Suzle) Tompkins. The annual con by and for fanzine fans. Come and find out what original fandom was (and still is) all about.

15-17—Boskone, % NESFA, Box G, MIT PD, Cambridge MA 02139. Boston MA. Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, artist Carl Lundgren. The big Eastern regional convention (2000 to 3000 fans expected).

22-24—WisCon, Box 1624, Madison WI 53701. (608) 251-6226 days, 233-0326 eves. Lisa Tuttle, artist Alicia Austin. The ninth annual edition. This con traditionally has a feminist emphasis.

MARCH, 1985

1-3—ConChord, Box 599, Midway City CA 92655. Los Angeles CA. Clif Flynt. SF folksinging con.

8-10—ConCave, Box 90962, Nashville TN 37209. Park City KY. Relaxed con at Park Mammoth Resort.

15-17—NorWesCon, Box 24207, Seattle WA 98124. Will usually draw over 100 authors, editors, etc.

15-17—LunaCon, Box 779, Midwood Sta., Brooklyn NY 11230. LaGuardia Sheraton, Queens NY. Gordon R. Dickson, Don Maitz, Curt Klemmer. The dowager queen of East Coast cons (once, the only big one).

AUGUST, 1985

22-26—AussieCon Two, 11863 W. Jefferson Blvd. #1, Culver City CA 90230. Melbourne, Australia. The WorldCon for 1985. Gene (New Sun) Wolfe, editor/fan Ted White. Guests too numerous to mention.

30-Sep. 2—ChiliCon, Box 9612, Austin TX 78766. The North American SF Interim Con for 1985 (NASFIC's are held only in years when WorldCon is outside North America). 3000 fans expected.

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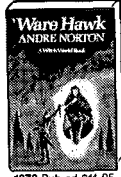
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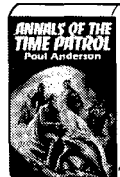
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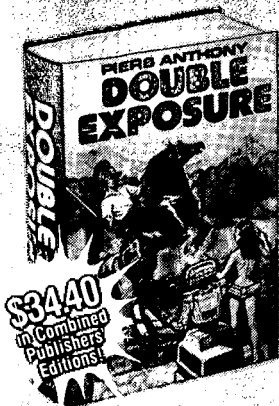
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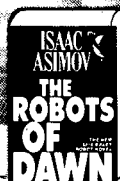
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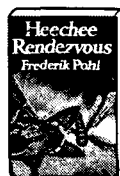
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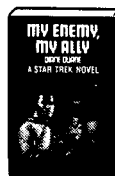
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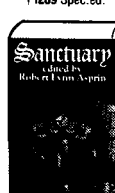
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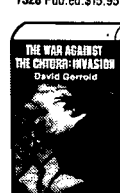
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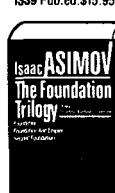
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